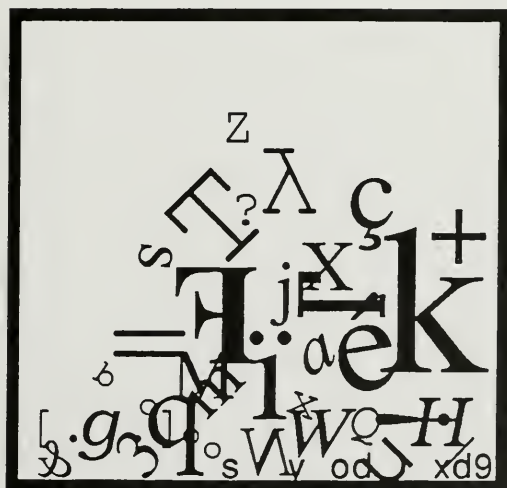


PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

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Volume 9 1991

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UCLA French Studies

Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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Medievalism: Testing Ground for Historicism(s)?

Round table discussion

with Peter Haidu, Alexandre Leupin and Eugene Vance

Recorded at the University of California, Los Angeles, on February 23rd, 1991 and edited by E. Charvier-Berman, S. Cordova, P. Merrill, A. Sol, J. Woodbury.

In 1989, a *New History of French Literature* was published in English, under the banner of Harvard University. Striking in its non-traditional presentation of the canon, it seeks to emphasize historical and cultural aspects of French literature from contemporary critical perspectives. Unconventionally organized, the commentaries still spring from chronologically arranged dates. Yet the issue of historicisms as modes for the examination of texts is side-stepped. The introductory statement addresses the fluidity of national, political, linguistic and textual frontiers for literature and critics today. Peter Haidu (UCLA), Alexandre Leupin (LSU), and Eugene Vance (U of W), medievalists of French, Swiss and American birth respectively underlined this fluidity, as they sat around hi-fidelity recording devices in the French Department *lectorium*, in UCLA's Royce Hall, a 1929 exact, if overscaled, replica of the Milanese Romanesque church of Sant'Ambrogio (c. 1100), and addressed the theoretical issue elided, in particular as it illuminates—or confuses—medievalism.

Word processing techniques have progressed over the last eight centuries, nevertheless the editors still faced the all too medieval problematic of transcribing the discourses. How does one not bury the voice?

I

Statements

PETER HAIDU

The challenge is not a one-way street: a post-structural medievalism and historicism challenge each other reciprocally.

"Historicism" designates a variety of methodological vices.¹ Though much criticized, it still exists, and can disguise itself as the *dernier cri* in the pages of *Speculum*.² As that historiography which collocates continuity, teleology, and the operation of a free-standing, independent, self-conscious subjectivity, historicism is not a reliable model for medievalism. Discontinuities repeatedly cut across medieval temporality: barbarian invasions, Christianity, the beginning of vernacular writing, the Black Plague are so many major gashes obviating medieval continuity. Beyond these evenemential discontinuities, there is the crucial epistemological discontinuity imposed by the Renaissance, which rips the hermeneutic connection between the 20th century reader and pre-Renaissance textuality, making a mediated form of analysis such as semiotics the requisite acknowledgment of medieval alterity.³ Teleology is the great gift of the Middle Ages, which gave us the first grand narrative: its teleology of salvation and redemption, transformed into various secular mythologies, is one of the banes of the contemporary intellectual struggle. A contemporary historiography which would restore medievalism to its historical importance will prefer a form of genealogy which acknowledges the interdependence of subject and object. And a free-standing subject, prior to the texts, operating as their source and origin and efficient cause, is a mere will-o'-the-wisp for the medievalist: many of our texts are anonymous, and where a name exists (Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, Renaut de Beaujeu), it is an insubstantial label which tells us nothing about the individual, his or her "background," his or her subjectivity, other than what can be gathered from the texts which are to be explained. Even at the end of the Middle Ages, "Christine de Pizan" is little more than her own textual creation; and who believes that a *dossier judiciaire* such as accompanies the name "François Villon" gives us privileged entry into a realm of subjectivity prior to his texts? The kind of secondary documentation that feeds traditional literary history by allowing the scholar to elaborate the figure of the poet or writer apart from his or her properly literary texts—journals, diaries, reviews, mani-

festoes—are absent from the documentary record. So flimsy is the historical documentation that a case has been made that the authors as well as their creations are fictive constructs. The instance of the individual writer mediating between concrete texts and social structure or historical process, remains an empty slot in the medieval case, incapable of being furnished with the “historically situated authorial consciousness” sought by historicism.⁴ Individual subjectivity in medieval France is a product of the text, not its precondition.

It is not any theoretical objections therefore devolving from contemporary theory that cancels historicism, it is the character of historical documentation itself. It is the epistemological conditions of the discipline which make the medieval case a perfect set-up for post-structuralism, quite aside from the inherent value of the theory. It is post-structuralism, at least in certain of its forms, which most adequately recognizes the historiographical problematics of “reading medieval.” And that is true particularly for those forms of post-structuralism whose ambition is a *historical* reading of medieval textuality, an intellectual effort disregarded by those who inveigh and complain about a supposedly “massive dehistoricization” of literary reading.⁵ All the wailing and complaining emanating from traditionalist positions, whether of literary history or social history, about the limitations of post-structural approaches, cannot change either the gross characteristics of the period, our relation to it, or the character of its historical documentation.

One mode of historicist self-legitimation is particularly misleading. It attempts to counter the modern critiques of empirical knowledge—coming from phenomenology, from the scientific theory of indeterminacy, and the centrality of language argued by (post-) structuralism—with a particular cognitive strategy that claims historical objectivity. It attempts to view the past through a perspective attested in the period in question, thinking thus to avoid the imposition of presentism upon past historical experience. The strategy is deceptive. Past historical societies are not flat, uniform, and cohesive: they are variegated and conflictual, otherwise they would not be historical. All the perspectives attested in a given period of the past are discourses situated within the conflicts of that period. Thus, Robertsonianism imposed a narrowly defined interpretation of the clerical perspective upon the interpretation of secular texts. In doing so, it selected, in the medieval scenes of conflict, the antagonist of the laity which had produced the texts, an antagonist which defined

itself in hostility to the values of that secular world, and specifically its texts. To claim objectivity for this procedure is ridiculous. An overt presentism is preferable to the covert politics of such historicist strategies.

The complaints of traditional historicism regarding the unsettling news of the (post-)structuralist revolution become tiresome: complaints are no substitute for intellectual argument countering the views one dislikes. The appeal to the authority of tradition *per se* can have no intellectual weight, when that is precisely what is in question: such appeals merely run with reactionary times. Nor can the slash and burn rhetoric which reduces the forms of post-structuralism to the clichés of the Sunday supplements, ignoring among other subtleties specifically those efforts made to historicize semiotics and deconstruction. These are the techniques of TV spots in political campaigns, not the dialectics of theoretical discourse. It is regrettable to see members of the left deploy Willie Horton tactics, and to have them sponsored by the Medieval Academy of America.

In spite of these deformations of intellectual discourse, the fundamental tenets of historicism cannot simply be written off. The criticisms of these tenets, entirely justified, do not resolve the issues to which the tenets were a response. The tenets of historicism—continuity, teleology, and subjectivity—mark the sites of problems that are still with us. Discontinuity appears only across the face of continuities, genealogy (which continues to acknowledge the need for history) is partly teleology reversed, and the question of the subject returns to haunt us ineluctably. Instead of the complaints that are the standard fare historicists indulge in, what is required is a renewed exploration of how we can construe the relations of the textual structures to a diegesis which is the near face of “representation” and how we can imagine and theorize the relations of that representation to the represented—recognizing their ineluctable differences as well as their identities. Historical discourse points in two directions simultaneously: the events it purports to describe, and the “generic story form” with which it construes those events as structure or process.⁶ It is the interface between those two faces of history—and of language—that is in question. Is it possible for language, discourse, and text to be sui-referential, self-reflexive, and hence modernist, on the one hand, and on the other, a critical representation of values at work in society, and to function, furthermore, as an agent of historical change, rather than simply as an index to change occurring else-

where? Careful semiotic and deconstructive readings of medieval texts show that both are possible, and simultaneously so. Textuality operates, not as an ideological exemplum or as a mimetic reflector of "social reality", but as a critical actor in the *différends* of its social formation.

Textuality is an institution, and medieval conventionalism institutionalizes textuality with immediate proleptic retroactivity. Medieval text gives itself as repetition, as "re-text," even and especially when it is at its most revolutionary. All invention is immediately "covered" by its own, self-reflexive conventionalization, and offered in the guise of ornamental redundancy and amusement. Meaning cannot simply be "read off" textual surface; decoding the dissimulative text implies a major effort.

This self-reflexivity does not imply the exclusion of the social and the historical. On the contrary, the extraordinary self-reflexivity of medieval textuality is a mode of its social ontology. Chrétien does not settle for inserting the image of the romance in the romance of the *Knight of the lion*, he goes farther, and implicates the romance-writer, at the service of the dominant class, within the representation of its culture, right after having narrated its harsh exploitation of the poor and the defenseless in proto-Marxist terms of surplus value.⁷ Self-reflexivity incorporates social, economic, and political dimensions in its complex mirrorings.

The attitudes of the traditional historicist historian would limit textuality to the mimetic function—Auerbach is still its critical hero. In that respect, it shares the same principles as what, a short while ago, was still referred to as "vulgar Marxism." Contemporary theory takes a more complex view. The diegesis of the text may well incorporate elements of social and political structures (where would those elements come from if not from social reality?), but the text's role is more active than mere reflection. It transforms those elements in profound ways. The figure of Charles, in the *Chanson de Roland*, can hardly be construed as the mimetic image of the kingship to which it is contemporary, especially in the earlier phase of the poem's development. During the reign of Philip I, around 1100, the traditional dating of the Oxford *Roland*, the French Capetians are at the nadir of their power. It is only under his son Louis VIth, that the king will begin to exercise effective suzerainty over his vassals in the Ile-de-France. This "meaning" is not stated in the text, but it is inscribed in the text, which labels Charles both king and emperor. The figure

of Charles represents a transformation of kingship, thanks to its junction with the ideologeme of Carolingian mythology and the seme of "empire." In mimetic terms, as a representation of a supposed "reality," the text lies outrageously, and is as factitious as it is fictitious. But is the figure of Charles to be accounted as having no effectivity in the realm of politics, which will see effective kingship develop to the point where the bases of the nation-state can be laid a hundred years or so after 1100, under Philip Augustus? Or should we leave open the possibility that the text, already characterized as transformative of the elements given by its encoding, may also be performative in its socio-historical insertion?

As distinguished from the superficial skirmishes to which the opposition of history and post-structuralism has given rise, the careful study of the medieval text as simultaneously structural and historical, may serve to dispell some of the false dichotomies which beset knowledge. One does not examine the forms and structures of the text first, and then look for its relations to a context. All codes, and all decodings, are historical. The text, medieval and other, is social *ab initio et origo*: textuality is a social fact. The medieval text is social, hence historical, therefore political. It is so in complex and unpredictable ways, and must be read as such, from the opening of the very first page. Its linguistic meanings, its formal organizations, its constitutive structures, are always already social, and historical, and political.

ALEXANDRE LEUPIN

J'aimerais commencer par un plaidoyer *pro domo*. Ce qui m'a toujours étonné dans les rapports et comptes rendus de lecteurs sur mes livres, c'est le reproche d'essentialisme, d'an-historicisme ou d'a-historicité de ce que j'essaye de faire avec la littérature médiévale. Cette critique m'étonne parce que je crois faire un travail qui est historique dans le sens où j'essaye toujours très précisément de déterminer les conditions d'énonciation d'un texte. Ces conditions ne sont pas évidemment dans les faits, dans l'histoire et peut-être dans l'histoire sociale mais elles sont dans un symbolique rhétorique, théologique etc., à partir duquel j'essaye de définir ce qui fait le texte littéraire.

Ceci dit, j'aimerais commencer par développer le problème de l'historicisme chez les historiens eux-mêmes, à partir d'un point extrêmement précis qui est celui de la falsification des documents du

Moyen Age. Ils se plaignent très souvent que les documents sont falsifiés, que les moines trafiquent des reliques etc.: mais cette plainte n'est recevable pour ce qui concerne le Moyen Age qu'à la lumière d'une mentalité positiviste moderne. Pourquoi n'est-elle pas recevable? Parce qu'elle ne tient pas compte de la mentalité symbolique du Moyen Age, pour laquelle il importe de plier les faits à une explication vraie. A cet égard le faux médiéval est symptôme de la vérité et il se rapproche de façon évidente de l'écriture littéraire dans le sens où Jean de Salisbury dit que "les poètes mentent pour dire le vrai." Prenons exemple des Serments de Strasbourg qui sont recueillis dans un unique manuscrit 150 ans après l'événement. Sont-ils authentiques? En fait, la question importe peu parce que leur opération peut se faire comme fiction ou comme document authentique en tant qu'ils promeuvent une nouvelle équation dans la culture: l'équivalence langue/nation. C'est là leur vérité. Sont-ils une sténographie fidèle, positive de l'oralité? Non, ils fondent dans l'écriture, dans une langue dont on a montré le caractère synthétique, une idée de nation tout à fait neuve qui recouvre ce qu'on appelle la *Francia occidentalis*. L'institution du français, comme l'a dit Renée Balibar, se fait par une langue fictive. C'est cela qui importe, plus que la correction pseudo-positive des graphies. Là, je suis très proche de toi, Peter.

Dans ce sens, il faut opérer sur le texte une lecture qui repositionne l'historicisme de 180 degrés. Il ne s'agit pas de constater passivement que les choses ont changé mais de constituer une poétique active des énonciations. L'histoire elle-même relève aussi d'une poétique, comme le dit Edouard Glissant. A un moment l'histoire doit se dire, et ce dire obéira aux contraintes, aux injonctions, aux utopies, aux procédures rhétoriques de son temps. C'est-à-dire que d'un côté, il faut mesurer les effets calculables qu'un dire, une profération, une inscription ont dans l'histoire à un moment donné. Inversement cette poétique du dit historique doit aussi être attentive aux efforts de désinscription qui font la littérature.

Ça m'amène à l'historicisme dans la lecture de la littérature. J'aimerais avancer une proposition: la lecture des textes littéraires a une vocation profonde et toujours recommencée à ancrer ce qui est proprement "littérature" dans un texte, à le ramener à une cause "externe." Je donne ici un exemple qui vous paraîtra peut-être un peu ancien pour montrer combien ce désir d'ancrage est fort. Bédier rabat la *Chanson de Roland* sur les routes de pèlerinage, aussitôt qu'il en

découvre l'autonomie poétique. Même s'il décrit cette profération en termes romantiques (le génie d'un grand poète etc.), sa découverte reste pertinente. Le fait est que cette découverte lui fait horreur et qu'il n'a de cesse qu'il ne l'ait réduite. Cet exemple, qu'on pourrait multiplier, fait symptôme d'une peur: celle de voir le texte littéraire se désinscrire du lieu de son énonciation, se désancrer de l'arrimage du sens. Or, cette peur est précisément ce qui fait rater à l'historicisme la dimension littéraire d'un texte: il y a un reste en littérature, qui est de la nature du déchet, de l'inconscient, de l'irreprésentable, alors que l'historicisme doit toujours travailler avec l'hypothèse d'une totalité représentable. Ce reste fait que tout texte se déplace sans cesse à travers l'histoire et revient nous parler dans notre présent. On peut ramener ce reste à la métaphore lacanienne de la *letter/litter* (déchet) qui est à la fois repérable et non-inscrite, c'est-à-dire, comme il l'écrit, *inter-dite*. D'après moi, c'est ce je-ne-sais-quoi qui donne la seule explication possible au fait que huit siècles après qu'un texte ait été écrit nous le fassions revenir dans notre interprétation et nous nous disputons à propos de son sens. A cet égard, une opération uniquement archéologique me semble être faite pour réduire au silence la part de la littérature.

Il faut aussi bien voir que tous ces discours de gestion et d'interprétation, les nôtres y compris, sont aussi (et tu y as fait allusion, Peter, quand tu as parlé de la problématisation objet-sujet), sont en partie littéraires dans le sens où la part du reste et de l'inconscient joue un rôle crucial chez nous, tout comme chez eux et de façon réitérée: par exemple, dans un discours comme celui des Pères de l'Eglise, il y a de la littérature, et de la meilleure, qui déjoue le calcul de la gestion idéologique ou interprétative.

Pour repérer où la littérature médiévale se sépare de son lieu d'énonciation, il faut revenir à la conception chrétienne que le Moyen Age se fait de l'histoire, en évitant le double piège de la religiosité mystique qui fait de Dieu la cause première, et du scientisme positiviste qui entend faire du Nouveau Testament encore une version d'un mythe. Ce n'est qu'à ce prix qu'on peut identifier la soustraction qu'opère la littérature par rapport aux déterminations juridiques, économiques, rhétoriques, théologiques qui entendent la gérer. C'est le concept de l'incarnation qui joue là un rôle central en ce sens que l'idée de Dieu cesse d'être une idée éternelle, comme chez les Grecs, pour être liée sans retour au devenir humain et précisément

par là à l'histoire. Même si elle ne le sait pas ou ne veut pas le savoir, notre conception moderne de l'histoire dépend de cette fracture fondamentale dans l'histoire de la pensée. A cet égard, le Moyen Age ne peut être que moderne.

J'ai été très intéressé par un mot dans le sujet qui nous a été proposé, c'est le terme de *testing* qui suppose que nous fassions un *experimentum mentis* au sens galiléen. Nulle théorie ne saurait se passer d'une pratique des textes, et là encore le X, la lettre de l'incarnation, qui est aussi un déchet, doit servir de guide au sens où, au Moyen Age, la littérature, inspirée par le modèle christique, fait poétiquement sa théorie dans sa pratique d'écriture. C'est-à-dire que toute théorie s'incarne, de façon parfois perverse.

J'aimerais proposer comme champ d'expérience les premiers textes en vernaculaire. Ils relèvent de toutes sortes de discours: pièces de résistance pour l'histoire, la critique littéraire, la phonétique historique, la rhétorique etc. Si ces approches restent isolées, elles n'ont aucune chance de saisir le dire de ces textes. La phonétique historique manquera, dans son idéologie sténographique, la nouveauté de la promotion à l'écriture que sont ces vénérables monuments. L'histoire s'aveuglera sur leur dimension d'invention profératoire, en les prenant pour des documents: c'est-à-dire la constatation d'un fait, jamais une profération relevant d'une poétique. La critique littéraire les éternisera dans le Ciel des idées.

Partons de l'événement évangélique: celui-ci suppose que le message s'énonce dans la Babel des langues sans que ses sens en soient altérés. "Ils furent tous emplis par le Saint Esprit et commencèrent à parler en d'autres langues suivant les directives de l'Esprit" écrit saint Paul. Il y a là une langue sans langue, celle du Saint Esprit chez saint Paul, celle de l'extase d'Ostie chez saint Augustin, qui dit, sans la dire, la vérité évangélique. Puis il y a les incarnations de la Babel historique des langues: l'une et l'autre sont indispensables à l'énonciation et à l'écoute du message. Il faut l'histoire pour communiquer, mais il faut aussi l'Autre de l'histoire qui est ici théologiquement l'Esprit.

Les premiers monuments en vernaculaire se placent tous dans l'orbite du texte paulinien. Pour ce qui est des Serments de Strasbourg, la profération poétique et historique de l'équivalence entre langue et nation est une coupure révolutionnaire qui se substitue à toutes les formes de transmission du pouvoir féodal et qui ne prendra son sens

qu'après des siècles d'élaboration. En ce qui concerne la *Séquence de sainte Eulalie*, nous nous trouvons en face d'un effort conscient, poétique et artificiel de donner une écriture à quelque chose qui ne fut pas parlé: une langue latinisante ou même provençalisante selon l'hypothèse fugace de Poirion, qui essaie de recouvrir le maximum de territoire de la *Francia occidentalis*. L'alternance des a/e muets, de la graphie Krist/Christus sont à interpréter non comme des maladresses mais comme le rappel volontaire de la langue liturgique dans l'écriture du vernaculaire. Il y a là une profération d'écriture qui obéit à une poétique d'autant plus raffinée qu'elle se dissimule sous la couverture rhétorique d'une *simplicitas* à la Quintilien. Elle fait semblant d'écrire peuple. *Eu-lalein*: bien écrire dès le départ selon des règles plus esthétiques que phonétiques. A ce propos, je trouve que le titre *Paroles Gelées* est fabuleux parce qu'il s'agit bien de geler la parole mais aussi de la dégeler dans la vie de la lettre sur le papier.

Ce bien écrire dépend aussi d'une coupure et d'une différenciation par rapport au latin. Ce latin est métaphoriquement mâle parce qu'il est la langue du pouvoir et de l'Eglise. On peut ici généraliser: toute inscription nouvelle suppose en fait une désinscription inaugurale, qui est sa condition même d'énonciation. *Eulalie* est à la fois une inscription neuve du texte liturgico-littéraire en vernaculaire et une désinscription par rapport au texte liturgique latin.

Je propose comme deuxième *experimentum mentis* la désinscription dans l'oeuvre de Guillaume IX, premier texte en provençal. Ici la phonétique historique fonctionne dans une double fiction: la première étant le bas-latin, langue inventée par les philologues, ce que Lacan aurait appelé une élucubration du savoir. Je n'en conteste nullement la nécessité, mais elle doit être toujours présentée comme une hypothèse au sens vraiment scientifique du terme: elle est opératoire. Mais la tentation du philologue est de la réifier empiriquement et c'est là que se place la véritable fiction ou l'imaginaire du philologue. La deuxième fiction est que la phonétique historique déduit toujours l'existence de parlers dialectaux réels à partir d'un monument littéraire anachronique. Les manuscrits datent du 13^e et 14^e siècles, cependant elle ne pose jamais la question si ces dialectes ne pourraient pas relever d'un effet rhétorique. En reprenant l'exemple de Guillaume IX, seul, ou à peu près, le comte de Poitiers atteste du "limousin," du "poitevin" etc. Charles Camproux l'a souligné: "la raison de l'emploi de formes empruntées à d'autres parlers que le parler de Poitiers, parler maternel de Guilhem, ne serait-elle pas simplement

une raison de métier poétique? Autrement dit, ne serions-nous pas en présence d'un problème de poétique et de rhétorique?"

Il faut cependant aller plus loin. La notion d'"emprunt" me gêne parce qu'elle repose presque uniquement sur les effets fictionnels calculés par l'écriture des manuscrits. Il faut la remplacer en bonne méthode par celle de fiction dialectisante, qui permet de saisir que les poèmes visent, comme *Eulalie* ou les Serments de Strasbourg avant eux, une aire linguistique de diffusion maximale.

D'autre part, il faut se rappeler qu'aujourd'hui encore, l'assimilation faite par les *vidas* entre Guillaume IX, prince d'Aquitaine parlant poitevin, et le "cuens de Peitieu" n'est qu'une hypothèse invérifiable. C'est ici qu'il faut faire coupure méthodologique par rapport à un certain historicisme. Car même si l'assimilation était historiquement certaine, rien ne nous assurerait que la langue ou le discours d'un poète soient identiques à ceux d'un grand seigneur féodal.

Sans entrer dans le détail, les poèmes mentionnent nombre de villes et de provinces, s'étendant de Montpellier à Niort, du Poitou à l'Anjou, pour exclure la Normandie et la France. Or, ces noms sont à la base des différentes identifications dialectales; le comte de Poitiers écrira en poitevin, en limousin etc. C'est un cercle vicieux méthodologique dans le sens où le monument littéraire est amené à faire preuve documentaire d'une réalité extérieure qui existe à peine, hormis la trace que, prétendument, il en conserve. Il faut ici inverser le problème: l'écrit profère, par ces noms, l'essence de son projet, son adresse poétique, distribuée de la Gascogne à l'Anjou, dans une langue qui est somme artificielle de parlers dialecticaux qui jouent poétiquement entre eux. De plus, "aller à Niort", c'est ne rien dire, "parler poitevin" ou "normand", c'est parler de façon ambiguë, l'Anjou, c'est la terre de la jouissance (du joy) et de sa perte, etc.: toutes figures qui s'accordent parfaitement à la poétique même du "comte de Peitieu."

Et encore: cette langue artificielle est déterminée par une autre langue. Cette langue, c'est celle du désir, barbarolexie proférée par le pèlerin pour parvenir à la jouissance d'Agnès et d'Ermessen dans le cinquième poème: l'indéchiffrable "barbariol, barbariol, barbarian," sinon à comprendre qu'il est le chiffre même de la jouissance. Cette langue échappe à la fonction de désignation et de représentation: considérée comme "muette" par les deux dames, elle se soustrait donc à tout imaginaire historique. Son inter-diction (dite et indicible) est à rapprocher de l'amie invisible et sans être du quatrième poème:

Amigu'ai ieu, no sai qui s'es
Qu'anc non la vi, si m'ajut fes.

Du désir nous avons des traces mais elles ne peuvent qu'être inadéquates à leur objet absent.

Que conclure de cet exemple, dont je vois bien le caractère limité? Je dirais que nul historicisme ne saurait rendre compte de cette autre langue, ni même et surtout la phonétique soit-disant "historique." Malgré leur légitimité, ces disciplines ne peuvent que s'aveugler sur le caractère déterminant de l'autre langue, par rapport à la manifestation historique, à la trace écrite que sont les poèmes. L'autre langue, déchet de la représentation, reste rétive à toute identification historique, même si cette dernière peut nous permettre de déterminer le lieu où elle vient à manquer.

Il faut remarquer aussi que le "barbariol" échappe à toute tentative de l'arrimer qu'en pourrait produire le discours de l'Incarnation. Non pas parce qu'il est la marque libératrice d'un désir sexuel (ceci cadrerait parfaitement bien avec la relance du désir que produisent les Pères en l'interdisant) mais parce qu'au contraire de l'Incarnation, il ne peut se manifester empiriquement. Ici, le poème du "dreyt nien" prend tout son sens. Ce néant absolu, il faut l'interpréter à la lettre, et non pas comme fiction, jeu, *riddle* purement verbal. La dimension a-chrétienne du poème apparaît alors pleinement. Je dis a-chrétienne pour ne pas le confondre avec l'hérésie. "Et le Verbe fut fait Verbe," tel pourrait être le leitmotif du "dreyt nien." Rien n'est: ni l'être même qui est cause première de la création *ex nihilo*, ni l'Incarnation. Seuls les mots *sont*, hors toute incarnation, hormis celle qu'ils trouvent sur la page du manuscrit, et, dans nos lectures non en tant qu'objet mais comme projet (le texte littéraire est plus qu'un objet—c'est un projet puisqu'il implique toujours un lecteur futur).

C'est pour cela, sans doute, que le comte de Poitiers est contraint d'invoquer, pour l'autorité de son dire, la seule littérature. Rappelez-vous le poème des dés:

Et en traig le vers a auctor.

Je suis le meilleur poète du monde mais la seule chose qui puisse le prouver c'est le vers lui-même.

EUGENE VANCE

I feel like I've been sitting not at a roundtable, but in front of a high-calibre artillery of written texts. I'm going to proceed differ-

ently, and speak about my experiences as a medievalist over the past thirty years as a way of trying to glimpse where I stand now on the problem of historicism, and of asking where we might go, say, in the next ten years.

My initiation as a medievalist began in 1959 at Poitiers, at the wonderfully interdisciplinary Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale. I was there for a *stage*, and I had not studied the Middle Ages. I had been working, rather, in the English Renaissance, so this was a real baptism. It happened to coincide with the first meeting of the Société Rencesvals, a learned society devoted to Old French Epic. This meeting gathered many of the great living Romance medievalists in one room at one time. Just to mention a few: Ramon Menendez-Pidal was there, but he refused to speak French; Martin de Riquer, Erec Köhler, Pierre Le Gentil, Jean Frappier, René Louis, Italo Siciliano, Aurelio Roncaglia, Maurice Delbouille, Paul Zumthor—all these were there, and I could go on for five minutes. It was incredible for me as an American greenhorn to be in a world which was devoted to one question: the origins of the *Song of Roland*.

The debate was passionate in ways that I rarely see nowadays in contemporary discussions of medieval culture. It was clear that these people were involved in a way that, to me, was mysterious. Now it's a little bit clearer. This was probably the last spectacular event where there was a consensus that the questions and the agenda of philology were still the only important way of making important critical and literary judgments. All agreed that the issue they were going to fight over was the national origins of the *Song of Roland*. At one point, René Louis even chanted something in order to win an argument. I also realized that I had no place in this debate. These were people who had all come through the thirties and forties, who had been trained as philologists searching for an origin as a basis for a national ethos. Although these scholars were being rigorously historical, they were in fact playing out a historiographical episteme whose underpinnings had been blown away by the experiences of the Second World War. By now, the teleology implicit to philology as a historical science had come to be seen by many as a destructive force.

Indeed, it was just at this time that general linguistics was proposing itself as a new master science promising just about everything to all other disciplines. The search in general linguistics was not for historical origins but for universals. It was a movement whose premises included a reaction against many aspects of the philologi-

cal episteme which had been so ideologically important (not just in Germany, but in all the countries of Europe, and even in America) in generating the Second World War.

In France, after this time, philology quickly lost its momentum. Such was not the case in Germany, and especially Italy. In fact, philology in Italy has kept pace intellectually even until now, because the Italians have been more eclectic and assimilative; nor was there in Italy the same radical cleavage that occurred in France with the events of May '68. The mid-sixties saw the proliferation of linguistically based disciplines: not only structural linguistics itself, but structural anthropology, structural semantics, semiotic theory and also psychoanalytical theory, to the extent that Lacan was reading the linguists, Roman Jakobson in particular, in the early sixties. Thus, linguistics was making inroads into psycho-theory as well.

This was a short-lived moment, I think. The structuralist project quickly led into other concerns which were really all centered on problems of discourse. People also began to realize that even these revitalized models of their disciplines were themselves historically determined in some crucial way that was important to understand. For instance, the American semiotician Peirce was best known by the public of his own time as a theologian, and not as a semiotician. He himself understood the theological and scholastic origins of his semiotics, as well as the context in which he was writing and publishing his semiotic theory. But the semioticians who first edited the Peircean corpus did so in a way to neutralize the theological context of Peircean semiotics. This perception led me to a serious question as a medievalist concerned with problems of discourse: should modern semioticians be cutting semiotics off from its rich history? Can semiotics pretend to be a mature science without recognizing and dealing with its own history? This question was especially pertinent to the reception of Greimas as well. Why is his actantial model so powerful? Greimas is a rigorous, scientific man, but one who does not accept the importance of the early history of semiotics underlying his own semiotic models. Nor is he concerned with discussing his own epistemological development. I have discovered this in two debates with him on this question, in 1972 and 1984.

By contrast, I have been gratified, as a medievalist, to observe how the discourse of Freud is being subjected to extraordinary analysis to see how his models came into place. In fact, the best psychoanalytical criticism in our time, in my opinion, is embodied in the search

for its own foundations, for an understanding of the processes by which this discourse constituted itself in the beginning of this century. The best Freudians are now meta-Freudians, who work in ways that are extremely creative. They are willing, moreover, to problematize the psychoanalytical apparatus in its complicated historical relationship to medieval texts. This kind of concern has been fueled by the Lacanians, because they had in Lacan a master for whom Augustinian psychology, semiotics, and models of mind were never indifferent. It's clear, at the same time, that Lacan was only a superficial reader of Augustine. I don't believe he ever read the *De trinitate* seriously. Had he done so, I think his models would have been challenged and transformed at a very early stage.

After the structuralist period, it seemed to me as a medievalist that it was important not to see how Freudian the West might be, but how Western Freud might be; not to see how Lacan had transcended theology, but rather how his own discourse is a laundered theology. So, during the post-structural period, major critical approaches which had considered themselves to be somehow outside of the historical process seemed to me more and more historically and institutionally determined. This was especially the case with deconstruction. There was nothing easier and more natural to me than to see how the claims of modern deconstruction were in fact designating an ongoing cultural crisis which may even to be said to have constituted medieval vernacular literature. And it was very easy for medievalists to see—because medieval texts are ineluctably burdened with a metaphysics of presence—that medieval writers do not fail to grasp, and even to accentuate, the troubled metaphysical dimension of their textuality, in other words, what the deconstructionists were so anxious to ferret out of modern texts. For me, the problem in the seventies was to ask how medieval theories of semiotics, of discourse and of understanding propelled the processes of creation, of propagation and of revision in medieval literary discourse. For this, Augustine has always provided an important matrix in which to work. (I'm getting away from this now, and some people will be glad to know it.) In Augustine, one found not only a provocative theory of the sign and of textuality, but also a useful theory of discourse in his recasting of Ciceronian doctrines of rhetoric. So too, one found in Augustine a rich psycho-theory based on the theory of the Trinity. Augustine also left us the legacy of a teleological historiography which has shaped all narrative representations of culture, including

our notion of "nation," right up to the present war [in Iraq]. It would be a drastic mistake not to see the continuity between the teleology of Augustinian models of culture and the very idea of the European Economic Community, not to mention the recent American crusade in the Middle-East.

LEUPIN: "Païen unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit."⁸

VANCE: *Oui*. At the same time, my own historical concerns were changing. I should mention that my first diploma was in History. It was at Strasbourg and I worked under the great French medieval historian, Bernard Guenée. My second real medievalist teacher was Robert Benson, now at UCLA, but whom I met at Cornell. So historians were my real entry into medieval study, and not the philologists. From the start, I was intrigued by the very complex relationship between literary texts and their contexts, both discursive and social. But this was a difficult time for someone with such interests: there were no methods, no models for dealing with these relationships. (Nor were there automatic professional rewards.) I began to take seriously the medieval rhetorical notion that human society is constituted of multiple speech groups competing with each other to define, and hence, to control, reality. I began to be aware to what extent medieval events not only respond to material circumstances, but engender them: there could have been no crusade without sermons. On this score, I totally agree with Alexandre and Peter on talking about the notion of a *poétique active*: a poetics which is a determinant of a social reality as much as it is a reflection of it. The idea of a mimetic realism in the Middle Ages is simply untenable.

So for me, the literary text—and when I say "literary," I mean it as in the sense of *grammatica*, the cultural space of writing—as soon as it became vernacularized, it began to represent and objectify thought and speech, not as a stable order, but as a zone of interference between discourses constituting the dynamism of the social group. As the rhetoricians knew so well, each discourse has its own lexicon, its own conceptual bundle, and its own repertory of illocutionary acts; and these discourses are constantly disrupting and transforming each other within the zone of the literary text.

Put otherwise, I used to consider the text as a totemizing operation. A text can assert a configuration of social power by assigning strict boundaries and functions to the discourses constituting the

social group. For instance, in the lyric by Guillaume IX that Alexandre mentioned, Guillaume clearly desired to assign specific spaces to certain political and geographical entities and to exclude others. This poetics is perfectly within the agenda of medieval rhetoric. The Dominican preacher Humbert of Romans decided that there were exactly one hundred different speech groups constituting the totality of the human race. This was the Christian people: non-Christians did not figure into the scheme of the totality of human speech. So, to include or exclude a speech group is already to order a world according to one's beliefs, needs and wishes.

By the same token, discourses undergo mutations when structures or modalities of power change. It's interesting that the nobility of Champagne began to write and that the discourse of the Champenois school of poets emerged at a time when feudal relationships were being archivalized. I mean this very specifically: in the mid 1160's, Count Henri le Libéral decided that he would compile written inventories of the feudal relationships that had been in force for generations and to centralize these into *rôles*. As all the names and properties of his vassals were identified and written into an archive, writing itself became a force that altered feudal relationships in a crucial way. It was also a time when the bourgeoisie—I use this in a strict judicial sense: a group constituted by a legal contractual relationship in 12th century society—mastered writing very quickly, because they were also the new practitioners of commerce, for which writing was indispensable. The nobility, therefore, had to acquire its own model of writing, a discursive model of its own, which could not be those of the bourgeoisie or those of the clergy. Such notions about discourse as emblem extended even to language: there was no *a priori* legitimacy to French as a mother language now constituting itself as a literary language in the place of latinity, indeed, as a demonumentalization of *grammatica*. Suddenly, you see a vernacular literature embracing the world of material desires and needs, and as it did so, rethinking the individual, the psychic, the social and even the metaphysical dimensions of human experience, meticulously de-spiritualizing and unpacking the repressive reflexes that had been dictated by the ecclesiastical community.

So, I have been aware of how important it is to see medieval literature as actively engaged in re-articulating social realities within changing modes of power that occurred in the 12th century. To study this process means learning to think in ways which go against

the grain of orthodox intellectual history and of course philology. Sometimes we have to learn to reverse chronology in the way we understand events so as to break the illusions of cause and effect, of source and influence. By this, I mean that the unsaid of a literary text and the generative powers of literary texts often become apparent only after the fact.

Therefore, it is important for us to use all the fine instruments of recent critical movements, including deconstruction, in order to practice a new and historically dense kind of discourse analysis. I find it amusing to see the Shakespearian establishment discovering only now what French medieval scholars influenced by the *Annales* school, by Althusser, and by Foucault, have been doing for ten or fifteen years. The Shakespearians are trying to stake out for themselves a new territory which, in fact, is an old territory for many of us. Though their level of theoretical reflection about history is a bit superficial, the scholarly outcome is in fact interesting and rich.

A historical approach to discourse analysis can also help us to deal with a question that none of the major critical movements, from philology up to our time, has been willing to address—with the possible exception of the Marxists. It involves addressing the ethical burden of literary texts, medieval or otherwise.

We all know that along with physics and logic, ethics was one of the three branches of medieval philosophy and that literary discourse too was often specifically seen as an exercise in ethics. To make such a claim does not mean that we should look to literature for recipes for proper or improper actions, but to see how medieval literary texts both grasp and transform ethical complexities into properly discursive events. By “discursive event,” I mean new assertions of social imperatives of a sort that cause old discourses to say new things, or cause new discourses to say old things. The tension that arises with hybridized discourses may be said to define the cultural moment.

For instance, embedded in the conventional discourse of 12th century courtly eroticism one may find a relatively complex model of economic exchange. Such is the case, as well, with Chrétien's *Yvain*. Surely this hybridizing amounts to an encoding of new economic priorities of the nobility of Champagne, who vigorously patronized commerce but did not themselves practice it. There can be no study of ethics that is not historical, and the renewed quest for “historicism” among students of medieval literature might well include in its

agenda the study of ethical problems through techniques of discourse analysis that would include, of course, consideration of the rhetorical assumptions of the medievals themselves.

Let me conclude by saying that the purpose of this retrospection is really to ask what we're going to be doing in the next 10 years or more. I believe that we, today, are on an epistemological threshold which is just as profound as the one in the mid-sixties. Our own knowledge and models of understanding are going to be severely tested by the new demands made upon us. Our world is changing irreversibly. I am surprised at how much overlap there is in our positions. We three started from very different bases and our discourses are certainly quite different from each other. Yet, over and over again, our different discourses lead us toward the same questions.

LEUPIN: Il y a des échos extraordinaires.

HAIDU: Echoes is, I think, an excellent expression. It is hardly an identity, but there is an enormous amount of recognition.

II

Discussion

HAIDU: I think that you've led us to a very important remark, which sets our own discourse in the historical context, for to characterize thought itself as historical is the essential part of any form of modern historical thought. You are talking about an epistemological threshold which sounds good, hopeful, at least I hope that it will be positive. However I think that the experience of the past thirty years that you've been talking about, gives us a model of how complex this kind of shift is, and it's not a shift of before, change, and after. It involves all sorts of continuations and invocations of the later period with the earlier period. And the very locution, which is so awkward and so unpleasant, of post-structuralism, gives the indication of complexity. Post-structuralism has never gotten outside of structuralism, even in criticizing it: I'm thinking of Derrida's first major book, the *Grammatology*. The criticism of structuralism, of both Saussure and Lévi-Strauss was done in terms of their own work. It was not that Derrida attacked them with something that came from outside, it was using Saussure against Saussure, Lévi-Strauss against Lévi-Strauss.

VANCE: Absolutely, and you can see how deconstruction has sought to protect itself from within from the ethical charges brought against Heidegger and De Man.

LEUPIN: Ce que dit Peter est juste. La pensée de Derrida est une radicalisation très rigoureuse de Saussure pris à la lettre.

HAIDU: I'm not sure what you were thinking of when you described Peirce as being known primarily as a theologian.

VANCE: in his time.

HAIDU: Peirce described himself as a scientist and this did not, and here I would agree with you, exclude a great deal of religious thought. What is very clear is that the semiotic theory of Peirce, what has been presented as a semiotic extraction of Peirce, is in fact a profoundly ambiguous project which wants to claim scientificity in late 19th, early 20th century terms. At the same time, it leaves itself open for a religious insertion. This was a dreadfully difficult challenge for Peirce throughout his life, I think, to be scientific insofar as he could both co-opt and respond to evolutionary theory and at the same time not set up intellectual structures that would exclude the religious. The whole issue of the ultimate interpretant and the final interpretant is for Peirce a possible theological resolution of interpretation. It's perfectly obvious, that the sources, particularly the medieval sources of Peirce, are theological.

As far as Greimas' an-historicization or an-historical self-presentation is concerned, I don't think it is true. It is certainly true that he does not situate his work in the long haul of semiotic theory. I don't know what work he's done in medieval language theory, but in the *Sémantique structurale*, his first book, he tries to specify his own historical insertion in the work that directly leads up to him: Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Hjelmslev, Souriau and Propp are very carefully acknowledged as the theoreticians from whom he is taking off. There are also indications in his work of his thoughts about history: a citation of Destutt de Tracy on ideology at the beginning of "Le Jeu des contraintes sémiotiques." I don't think that's accidental. I think he sees himself as picking up again the 18th century Enlightenment project of a science of ideas. He also talks directly about history in *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*.

VANCE: Well Peter, taking the case of the semiotic square and its relationship to the *carré logique*, he's been drawn out on this. He denies

that he developed this *carré sémantique* from the *carré logique*. There is a published interview of Greimas' with Alain de Libéra,⁹ in which he says that this came independently out of his own re-workings of Brøndal, and Lévi-Strauss. It's as if his *carré sémantique* wasn't just a restatement of the fundamental model of reflection that had been available in Western culture all through the Middle Ages: his *carré sémantique* is functionally identical to the *carré logique*. There is an historical redundancy here which Greimas plays down by stressing only his recent sources. I would also ask whether the roots of his actantial and actorial models do not lie very deeply in a Greek and Russian Orthodox theology of archetypes.

HAIDU: Greimas never presents it as having been dreamed up out of nothing. On the contrary he's very careful, the whole book of the *Sémantique structurale* is an explanation of each minute, little, incremental step that he takes on the models of Souriau and Propp: he derives his model from theirs. Now the notion that they have cultural roots, I think, is perfectly valid; it's also fairly obvious that he does not present it as a radical invention. So, no, he's not primarily an historical thinker.

VANCE: Would you say that he is anti-historical?

HAIDU: No, absolutely not. In '78, I explained to Greimas the way I was thinking of using his model of the semiotic square for historical purposes and he said that's what he had always thought. He recognizes here some of the middle period work that he's done, that I'm drawing on, which has not been picked up by most of the people around him. So, no, I don't think he is an historical thinker, I think he's developed stuff that can be used for historical purposes, which is as you know what I've been doing for a number of years. The question is: is it productive of knowledge? It seems to me that insofar as one wants to deal with the specificities of texts as totalities of their own, the semiotic models he's produced become extremely useful.

VANCE: Let's be precise and take a concrete example that I'm dealing with in my current work on the problem of icons and iconoclasm. This is semiotics in the most extraordinarily rigorous and socially relevant way, to the extent that the debate about images determines whether churches would be destroyed, wars would break out, and whether people would be punished and excommunicated

because they either refused to, or insisted on, venerating icons. Now the theology of semiotics at work in these debates has many common points with modern semiotics. What does it mean if we take a modern semiotics to study a medieval image or the veneration of that medieval image, unless our semiotics allows an abundant place for the semiotics which first generated the pictures, generated the veneration of these pictures, and generated the debate about them?

HAIDU: It seems to me that there was probably a semiotic conception. This is not Greimas, this is Eco. The decoding process is always different from the encoding process. And this becomes all the more so when you're dealing with encoding processes which are historically and culturally so far removed from us. There is no way in which we can get back into the position of the encoding process. I think that within certain limits one can hope to get some information. To try to look at a historical process from the point of view of a participant is not a value-free operation. It does not guarantee objectivity. On the contrary, it guarantees that you will be a participant in a conflictual process, that is to say, you will choose sides. Now, I have no problem with that. However the criticism I do make of that procedure is that you cannot present that as a mode of historicism which gets you away from present political values.

VANCE: I'll agree with that.

HAIDU: In choosing to view the political process from the perspective of a participant, insofar as that's possible, you are actually accepting the political implication of that position, and making it your own . . .

VANCE: Well I'm not sure about that.

HAIDU: . . . for the purposes of the analysis.

VANCE: I think we're at an impasse right now. We'd have to go into a lot of the theological disputes about images that come out of acts of the Second Council of Nicea in 787 before we could really get beyond this.

HAIDU: Even before that. One cannot deal with the inheritance of Augustinian sign theory, which you've explored so often and so fruitfully, and ignore its theological implications. You cannot study the production of signs, the interpretation of signs from an Augustinian point of view . . .

VANCE: That's true.

HAIDU: . . . without accepting a theological position.

VANCE: That's not true.

HAIDU: Well, I don't really see the difference, but the alternative I propose is that the Greimassian codification of semiotic models in the Dictionary¹⁰ allows you to announce what you are doing. You can play to the models that you are employing. Now you can never announce all your investments, all the principles that lie behind your moves because there are always more pre-suppositions.

LEUPIN: Gene, ta biographie intellectuelle m'a énormément intéressé. Ce premier meeting de la Société Rencesvals m'a fasciné. Je me demande cependant si c'est la deuxième ou la première guerre mondiale qui compte? Que la première guerre mondiale soit le suicide de l'Europe des nations, c'est tout à fait clair. C'est un problème dont l'origine est médiévale parce que l'Europe des nations est née au Moyen Age avec les Serments de Strasbourg. Il y a donc toutes sortes d'implications qu'il faudrait essayer de dégager. Ce qui s'est passé dans les études médiévales ces derniers vingt ans, ce renouveau extraordinaire, c'est un renouveau qui est parti de l'excentricité. Il n'a pas été fait à Paris, mais sur les bords de l'empire intellectuel, c'est-à-dire en Belgique avec Dragonetti, ensuite à Genève, avec Méla et Cerquiglini qui ne sont pas à la Sorbonne, et en Amérique avec tous nos amis que je ne mentionnerai pas, on les connaît bien. Ça pose un problème extrêmement important. Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire maintenant? Est-ce qu'on va mettre l'accent sur une espèce de colonie intellectuelle internationale construite sur le modèle des nationalités européennes au Moyen Age, avec cette articulation du latin qui permettait naturellement à une toute petite élite d'échanger des idées aux quatre coins du monde? Ou est-ce qu'on va essayer de constituer le prochain pas sur le modèle d'une poétique mondiale à la Glissant? (Voir *La Poétique de la relation* où il essaie d'articuler la relation de toutes les différences.) On assiste ici à une décentralisation de la pensée et, paradoxalement, les USA en sont le laboratoire. Sur un plan plus personnel, je crois pouvoir dire que la figure de l'exil par rapport à la centralité européenne a été essentielle à ma pensée et m'a permis de regarder le Moyen Age d'une façon tout à fait différente.

Pour la question de la théologie lacanienne: je ne suis pas du tout d'accord. Si vous relisez "La Science et la vérité" dans *Les Ecrits* il

y a là un refus radical de la magie et de la religion dans le sens où le religieux se trompe toujours en mettant Dieu à la place de la cause. François Regnault, dans son livre *Dieu est inconscient*, arrive à la conclusion que la pensée de Lacan est le seul athéisme radical possible. Cependant Lacan dirait de l'inconscient exactement la même chose que dit saint Augustin de Dieu dans l'ouverture des *Confessions*, qu'il est impossible à dire, mais qu'il faut quand même le dire, l'étudier, y penser.

VANCE: When I talk about the hidden re-inscribed theological dimensions of psychoanalytical discourse, I go back to Freud's notion of the unconscious and not to Lacan's. If you look at the Freudian topology, which is a tripartite topology of the soul, and you look at the language in which Freud describes the *id*, you will see that this language draws on a heavily theological way of talking about God as eternal, timeless, non-negating. Freud inverts this metaphysical language and locates its concepts in the biological, in a Darwinian model which is evolutionary. Freud therefore gives us the illusion that his discourse about the *id* has eliminated the theological, that is to say the Augustinian discourse about God as *Idipsum* (the "it-itself"). Its truth value is enhanced by the very fact that it seems to be anti-theological. To this extent, it is a revision of theology in the name of a new kind of science. It's no doubt pertinent that this occurred at a specific moment in Freud's life, when his father had died and the conditions of his psychic life had changed. The whole relevance of a discourse which has inverted a theological model, is precisely that it allows the theological model to persist under a new set of premises, and still provides many of the functions that a failed religion offered to so many people. So the topological models of Freud, Lacan and Augustine are in dialogue with one another, even if this dialogue is implicit rather than explicit.

HAIDU: That there is a dialogue, that there is a reincorporation and transformation, the point is well made. Now does this mean that we strip away the layer Lacan/Freud moving it back to a point of origin, like the Augustinian, or do we keep the structure of dialogue present in our mind? Does Lacan dialogue with Freud and Augustine? Or does Freud consciously or not, and I am perfectly willing to accept that, partially incorporate Augustinian structures? What is the next stage? Is there a resemblance, an inheritance?

VANCE: No, I don't think so. I think we have to go farther than that, Peter. It seems to me that many aspects of modern psychology originated in a theological discourse that emerged in the 4th century. The real laboratory for this is Augustine's *De trinitate*. It is not an accident that the greatest psychological treatise of early Western culture developed as an investigation of the Holy Trinity. The tripartiteness of the soul is an image of the Holy Trinity. The three functions: memory, intellect and will overlap to a certain extent with the tripartiteness of the *id* which is recovered through memory.

Alexandre insists quite correctly on the importance of the Incarnation. However the dogma of the Incarnation was something which was not accepted for many centuries by the different cults, and there are still Christian sects which have never acknowledged the Incarnation. Thoughts about the Incarnation also summoned a reflection about the *Saint Esprit* which de-incarnalizes human knowledge of God, universalizes and makes infinitely repeatable the event of the sacrifice of Christ's body, through the operation of the Eucharist. Now it seems to me that if you are going to talk about the *coupure* of the Incarnation, you have to see this developing within a much larger problematic of the Holy Spirit. So yes, Peter, the dialogue must go on, but it must include an awareness of how certain major discursive permutations occurred in early Western culture and whether we can accept, as a model in psychoanalytical exchange, a certain functioning which will orient us towards ourselves, towards those that we love, hate and so forth. Will this model remain static? Of course not. Will psychoanalysis be around in fifty years? It is not at all clear. And psychoanalysts, if you ask them this question, they blanch.

LEUPIN: J'ai écarté de mon modèle le dogme trinitaire et la résurrection: la résurrection est une tentative d'effacement de la révolution promue par l'Incarnation. C'est très patent chez saint Paul quand il dit que Dieu s'est anéanti lui-même: il parle bien de la mort de Dieu. Donc si je suis théologien, je suis un théologien de la mort de Dieu. La résurrection ne fait pas partie de mon schéma explicatif. Quant à la Trinité, je trouve ton analyse très fine dans le sens où tu montres bien que c'est quelque chose qui n'est pas spécifique au christianisme. En inversant ta lecture, je crois que Freud peut reprendre le dogme trinitaire dans un tout autre contexte. Je ne pense pas que ce dogme désigne d'une façon précise la spécificité du christianisme et c'est pour

cela aussi que je l'ai écarté du modèle pour ne retenir que l'Incarnation.

HAIDU: There is something that strikes me Gene. You pointed to a change in your thinking during your autobiographical remarks. But it seems to me that it is not a "repressed," that the old does return into the new and I wonder about this return. You have had this discourse of the economic and the historical, concerns that both you and I share, for quite some time. At the same time, there is this return of a theological discourse, not only in terms of your own intellectual evolution, but in terms of a cultural one as well.

The dominant discourse about the Middle Ages has been theological? Not always. I believe that during the period of Classicism and during the Enlightenment it was not, but at some point during the 19th century the dominant historiographic discourse about the Middle Ages turned religious and has remained the dominant discourse.

LEUPIN: Quand tu parles de la théologie au 19^e siècle, j'irais même plus loin. Je dirais que le scientisme positiviste du 19^e siècle dans lequel s'est constituée notre discipline, c'est l'autre face de la même monnaie qu'est la foi. Cela suppose un acte de foi, ça, c'est sûr.

HAIDU: And I see this theological discourse returning with you, Gene, even after you have, at least at some point in your thinking, adopted a completely different discourse *qui ne cadre pas*, with the theological. If you are talking about the creation of banking systems, nation states, new kinds of judicial arrangements within society, which are, I believe, what the 12th century was primarily concerned with, it is a discourse which does not obviously fit into the theological. The only way it can, as far as I can see, is by accepting exactly the kind of identification of the semiotic with the theological that I pointed to in Augustine, which is an identification that you accepted up to a point.

VANCE: I do not look on the return of theology as the return of certain permanent, eternal conditions of Western culture and of our own thought. It is very important to see the specific social conditions under which this theology emerged in the first place, and also what was lost when this theology was installed. There were many alternatives in the model of the Trinity, each one carrying different ethical values. Early Christianity was the time when the dominant family models were set in our culture; it was also the time when gender

models were established in Western discourse. These resulted from choices that were historically open and subject to alternatives which have been excluded. When they changed radically, the premises of theology changed in very radical ways. For instance, most people agree that Jacques Le Goff has overstated the novelty of the idea of Purgatory in the 12th century. But I think he is absolutely right in suggesting that a major theological inflection occurred in the 12th century. Why did it occur? It occurred because the new ethical values of commerce, the quantification of service, the crimes people committed, the idea of a just price were generating a new space, a new use of that theological concept of Purgatory as an area of exchange.

In every major intellectual and cultural revolution theology has undergone inflections. So I don't look on theology as a kind of permanent parameter of our thought, but as a dynamic process which also includes the mutations that I would identify as those of psychoanalysis.

Haidu: I would go to the point of saying that in so far as any discourse asserts itself to be grounded, and to rest upon ultimate values, it's going to be theological in some profound sense.

But the Middle Ages are much more varied than is generally credited. There are very strong and important counter-Augustinian currents which start in the 11th century, and which become major in the 12th, which have not been sufficiently taken into account; this applies both to the variety of theologies and to applied theologies. For instance, there is an applied theology to the issue of the just price, to the issue of social relations among the men of the Church, as in John Baldwin's huge two-volume work on the circle of Peter the Cantor. Applied theology becomes practical theology as it is adapted to the historical development of a new economic class. There one has to ask: at the point of application, doesn't the theological reading of history transform the theology itself? The boundary between the theological and the non-theological is unclear. There are many modern discourses—you've picked up on Freud, and I have no problem with that—which are implicitly theological in a structural sense, not in a sense of content, not in addressing God as a specific entity, but insofar as the structure of the system of thought reproduces that which we traditionally think of as theological.

Let me switch the discourse back to Alexandre. I have never reproached you with a-historicism.

VANCE: Neither have I.

HAIDU: I have been conscious of your work's modernity. I was very aware in the book on the Grail, of the way in which you were, in the most delicate way imaginable, responding to historical issues even when they went unacknowledged. So I don't think of it as a-historical at all. But I do see the recurrence of transcendent categories as if we were talking about eternities. It came out this morning with the notion of *l'esprit comme l'Autre de l'histoire*. Evidemment il faudrait pouvoir définir les rapports d'altérité. Proposer l'Incarnation comme l'événement qui serait la chose médiévale est historiquement une possibilité théorique. Le choix semble ramener le discours théologique dans des activités dont la convenance n'est pas évidente.

LEUPIN: On a été, tous les trois, dans l'harmonie d'une écholalie extraordinaire mais je crois bon de cerner ici une différence. Je peux concevoir la Renaissance comme une coupure dans un sous-système de pensée, voir même une régression. Quelle est cette régression? C'est le retour humaniste, après la coupure chrétienne, aux textes que j'appellerais païens. Il s'agit de rétablir la fiction d'une continuité de la tradition occidentale. Ce n'est pas une fiction du tout innocente, la fiction de la tradition occidentale: nous en connaissons tous les effets dévastateurs. Elle repose évidemment sur l'idée d'une continuité entre les Grecs et nous, qui saute le Moyen Age. C'est un des fantasmes les plus ravageurs de l'histoire. Mais je ne peux souscrire à ta formulation de la Renaissance comme lieu coupant le Moyen Age. J'affirmerais que le Moyen Age est essentiellement moderne étant donné que la coupure se situe non pas entre moderne et ancien, mais d'après Kojève, entre chrétien et païen. Dans ce sens, je ne pense pas que le Moyen Age, historiquement parlant, soit notre Autre.

HAIDU: On n'a pas entièrement abandonné le Moyen Age après la Renaissance. Pendant la Renaissance même, il y avait certains textes qu'on continuait à lire, non pas *La Chanson de Roland*, non pas Chrétien de Troyes, mais Villon et *Le Roman de la rose*. Il y a deux thèses, de Nathan Edelman, de Lionel Gossman, qui tracent les contacts—minimes, fréquemment de seconde main—qu'on a gardés, aux 17^e et 18^e siècles, avec quelque chose de vaguement médiéval. Il me semble qu'il y a donc tout de même eu une rupture de contact avec les textes du Moyen Age, et ça ne peut reprendre qu'au 19^e siècle avec le romantisme, avec évidemment d'autres lentilles déformantes.

LEUPIN: Là, je suis tout à fait d'accord, mais je crois qu'on parle à deux niveaux différents.

HAÏDU: D'accord, mais pour moi, c'est le niveau où doit travailler la sémiotique à la place de l'herméneutique. Cette question est entièrement liée au conflit entre sémiotique et herméneutique. Il est impossible, me semble-t-il, de travailler à l'intérieur de l'herméneutique sur les textes médiévaux à cause de cette coupure. Ce n'est pas le cas, d'ailleurs, ni en Allemagne ni en Angleterre, *because the English and the Germans have kept a continuous tradition of contact with medieval texts*. They haven't had the kind of patricidal warfare that the French have had, which has extended in fact over two or three centuries, of cutting themselves off from the medieval paternity.

What is very peculiar is that there is no country in Europe where the political system is such a direct heritage of the Middle Ages as in France, and the Marxist viewpoint that the Middle Ages continue through feudalism and the monarchy of the *ancien régime* up to the French Revolution is perfectly justified politically. Yet there's an enormous discrepancy between the political heritage and the intellectual tradition, where the *coupure* of the humanists and the Pléiade was extremely effective at the level of culture. For me, the problem is one of running up against texts where we cannot be certain of our ability to decode them. If I read a modern text, from Mallarmé on, which I don't understand, I know that my non-understanding is an appropriate reaction. But that's not necessarily the case for the Middle Ages.

LEUPIN: Là encore, on n'est pas d'accord, parce que Proust est obscur, aussi bien que Marie de France, et sur le même plan: on a chez Proust l'illusion d'une compréhension dont on découvre après qu'elle est insuffisante. Par ailleurs, j'espère, Peter, que tu ne me ranges pas parmi les herménéuticiens, parce que ma position est complètement différente. L'herméneutique suppose toujours qu'il y a du sens avant, et pour moi, évidemment le sens vient quand il est construit par un signifiant.

Pour revenir à ta question, Peter, tu ne m'accuses pas d'anti-historicisme, mais d'essentialisme. C'est tout à fait clair, et comment se tirer de ce guépier-là, parce qu'il est évident que mon geste ne vise pas du tout à faire, ou à refaire, une théologie de la littérature? C'est là justement où tu m'ennuies. Je suis pris dans une double impasse: je ne suis pas essentialiste, mais ma vision de la littérature n'est pas

non plus, primordialement historique. Je reprends l'exemple de Guillaume IX et le poème du droit néant. Faire un poème du droit néant, c'est affirmer le néant. C'est un geste essentiellement satanique qui détermine son texte historiquement dans le sens où il répondrait parfaitement aux paramètres d'une hérésie datable.

Pour me tirer d'affaire, je propose de lire le néant, le je-ne-sais-quoi, c'est-à-dire aussi la figure de la réflexivité dans le texte médiéval, non pas comme une réponse hérétique ou déterminée par un moment historique de la théologie, mais comme l'évocation réelle d'une autre langue qui n'est pas prescriptible par des représentations, et qui donc, place l'altérité de la littérature en dehors de l'histoire. Et si c'est un geste essentialiste, au fond tant pis, parce que je pense que c'est un geste qui permet de lire mieux ces textes. Tout ceci est un peu confus, parce que cette question me tourmente depuis de longues années, et je n'ai pas réussi à la résoudre entièrement.

HAÏDU: Pour moi le pire, c'est qu'avec tes suppositions essentialistes —s'il faut les nommer telles—tu arrives à produire des lectures de textes médiévaux qui me semblent extrêmement valables, importantes, et parfaitement historiques parfois.

LEUPIN: L'épisode du château de Pesme Aventure, que vous avez travaillé tous les deux et dont il a été question plus haut, m'intéresse. J'ai une hypothèse de travail toute simple qui est l'équivalence du tissu/texte. Et la question se pose si c'est la fabrique du texte toute entière ou s'il n'y a pas d'autres moments où cette fabrique est contredite par le texte lui-même. Ce qui me frappe, c'est qu'il y a un satanisme à l'oeuvre qui fonctionne comme précondition de toute la fabrique textuelle.

VANCE: If you'll permit me to argue historically, this is a moment of extraordinary transformation of these social imperatives into a quasi-theological argument, and some of them have very important implications. There were indeed factories weaving and exploiting labor, not in Troyes, but in Flanders. The problem of the exploitation of workers in weaving *ateliers* could be perceived outside of Flanders as a grave and potentially menacing problem for the whole nobility which is patronizing commerce. But what is important for us, is that Chrétien articulates these problems much more subtly at other levels, as when he draws on the etymological trope textile/text. As you remember, at the center of this space is the family sitting on silk

rugs—silk being NOT wool—and they are listening to their daughter reading aloud some romance “ne sai de cui.”¹¹

HAIDU: Which is obviously Chrétien’s play, and it has its own function of producing the romance. He is implicating both his romance and himself as its producer by the phrase “ne sai de cui.”

VANCE: The sixteen-year-old maiden, Chrétien says, is so beautiful that even if he were God, he would allow himself to be incarnated to enjoy her. In other words, the appeal, the attraction of the girl is to force, once again, the model of incarnation as some great transgression. Why would a God ever want to assume a mortal condition? The whole erotic process is tied up with the act of reading. Don’t forget also that Yvain had first fallen in love with Laudine while she was reading her psalter and about to bury her husband Esclados. So the process of reading is seen as the quintessential mode of production and exploitation that becomes theological, involving even the notion of incarnation.

LEUPIN: Théologiquement perverse.

HAIDU: Reading as the quintessential moment of production/exploitation? I think Alexandre was suggesting the equivalence between the first two parts of the episode of the *Aventure*, with the *tissu* being both the text and the stuff that’s being produced for sale, which is the basis of the nobles’ wealth and power. Now, to make the suggestion of a kind of reflexivity between the notion of the literary text, and the production of another kind of *tissu*, that makes perfect sense to me. This is a part of the non-exclusive reflexive structure that I see in Chrétien all the time. What does not make sense to me, is to collapse the two, to say there is nothing but reading.

VANCE: No, it is like an onion. We go through many, many formulations of desire, need and reproduction, and at the center of this onion, if you want to look at the castle of Pesme *Aventure* as an onion, there is this nucleus of the reader reading a text that has destroyed its author.

HAIDU: I don’t know if it has destroyed the author. He has certainly implicated himself, which is, I think, exactly what I was trying to say at the beginning.

Notes

1. Useful introductory surveys are those of Hayden White, "On History and Historicism" in Carlo Antoni, *From History to Sociology*, Detroit, 1959; and "Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination" in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 101-20; and Maurice Mandelbaum, "Historicism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York & London: Macmillan, 1967/72) v IV, 22-5. Other major texts in the discussion of historicism are: Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Histoire et dialectique" in *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962) 324-57; A.J. Greimas, "Structure et histoire" in *Du sens* (Paris: Seuil, 1970) 103-16; Louis Althusser, "Le marxisme n'est pas un historicisme" in *Lire le Capital*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maspero, 1975) v I, 150-84; Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism" in *The Ideologies of Theory*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1988) v II, 148-77; and Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) especially 378-85, as well as "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell, 1977) 139-64. The great example of historicism in literary history, of course, is Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* trans. William Trask (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1957). Important additions to Auerbach's historicist dossier are two essays in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1959): "'Figura'" and "Vico and Aesthetic Historicism."

2. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages" in *Speculum* 65 (1990) 59-86.

3. Peter Haidu, "The Semiotics of Alterity: A Comparison with Hermeneutics" in *New Literary History* 21 (1989-90) 671-91.

4. Spiegel, 62.

5. Spiegel, 76.

6. Hayden White, "Historicism, History, and the Imagination" in *Tropics of Discourse*, 106.

7. Peter Haidu, "The Hermit's Pottage: Deconstruction and History in Yvain" in *Romanic Review* 74 (1983) 1-15.

8. *La Chanson de Roland* ed. Joseph Bédier (Alfortville, 1974) v. 1015.

9. *Structures élémentaires de la signification*, ed. Frédéric Nef (Brussels, 1976).

10. A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979).

11. Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au lion*, publié par M. Roques (Paris: Librairie Champion, 1971) v. 5360.

Between *fantasque* and *fantasmagorique*: a fantastic reading of Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*

Nicoletta Pireddu

A reader of literature always finds implicit or explicit clues in a diegesis to unmask the imaginary quality of the story: the notion of truth in diegesis, as Michael Riffaterre underlines,¹ is paradoxically bound to the fictionality of the work and conditioned by its textual nature. Once arranged on the written page, words are no longer directly linked to external reality through a process of mimesis, but rather, they interact within the narrative structure. The text, however, compensates for the split between verbal representation and non-verbal entities with "signs indicating a convention of truth, signs of a plausibility that make readers react to a story *as if* it were true" (2, my emphasis). Verisimilitude as a descriptive system is the result of such a pact, which allows external referentiality to be indirectly evoked in the text through reality effects. It is exactly the code of the real which opens *La Peau de chagrin*, in line with Honoré de Balzac's literary technique: the gaming-house scene, where the protagonist is introduced, epitomizes what in the "Préface" becomes the main faculty of writers: "Ils *inventent* le vrai, par analogie."² Through invention and analogy, an artificial world is created, where events, however fictional, are ordered according to a coherent causal sequence; although "exterior referentiality is but an illusion" (Riffaterre 3), expectations are fulfilled and the "as if" strategy sustains the compromise between the narrative system and assumptions about reality.

It is in these terms that we can read the "atroce épigramme" (Balzac 18), the "poésie vulgaire," the "mélodrame plein de sang" (20) which condense and literalize the atmosphere in the first sections of the novel. The law which protects the passion of gambling is also a guarantee of precision, in that it imposes the temporal and spatial parameters which frame the opening scene: "quelque temps après l'heure à laquelle s'ouvrent les maisons de jeu, . . . un jeune homme vint au Palais-Royal; et, sans trop hésiter, monta l'escalier du tripot établi au numéro 39" (17). Nevertheless, there is something in the same page which escapes the "miroir concentrique" of the author's imagination, "où . . . l'univers vient se refléchir" (8). By hinting at a "contrat infernal" (17), the narrative voice makes another sign system interfere with the code of the real, and anticipates an alternative pact: the "as if" convention which seems to be grounded in verisimilitude becomes at the same time the mediator between the natural and the supernatural, between Raphael's rational realm and the disconcerting powers of the magic skin. Not simply a *speculum* for Balzac's realistic representation, the novel turns into a form of unresolved speculation about a chain of events which defy everyday logic. "Est-ce une plaisanterie, est-ce un mystère?" (307), the protagonist wonders examining the talisman: it is exactly this hesitation between these two possibilities, deprived of any final answer, which calls the fantastic into being. Like Raphael and the other characters at the gambling-house, the novel as a whole is *en jeu*, at the mercy of an interplay of *fantasque* (264) and *fantasmagorique* (49), two opposing poles which epitomize, respectively, Todorov's notions of "uncanny" and "marvelous".³ The "bizarre, capricieux, changeant"⁴ events which the *fantasque* alludes to, correspond to those apparently unexplainable phenomena which, for the Bulgarian critic, are finally deciphered according to the laws of reality. Similarly, with the supernatural effects implied by the *fantasmagorique*, the novel enters the realm of the marvelous, which is ruled by a new set of norms. Attempts to interpret the nature of the magic skin create an oscillatory movement between these categories, and describe a middle ground of hesitation on which the fantastic quality of Balzac's text is founded.

1. The deviation from the realistic code.

The moment Raphael leaves the *maison de jeu* to enter the *maga-sin de curiosité*, the law which controls human actions according to

a logic of order and ordinariness ceases to be effective. If among the *visages de plâtre* and the *coeurs glacés* it is the protagonist's own presence which arouses a "sentiment épouvantable" (Balzac 23) and which seems to conceal some horrible mystery, once he begins wandering through the streets of Paris, then the disquieting atmosphere of the city at night anticipates the hallucinatory topography of the antique store. The reality effect, still sustained by Raphael's itinerary along historical monuments, is set against unsettling encounters with weird figures which interfere unexpectedly with his suicidal projects: the sarcastic comments of the old woman dressed in rags and the hideous appearance of the two beggars work as intimations of that irrational, demonic realm already evoked by the opening image of the infernal contract, and magnified in the following section.

Raphael's visit to the antique dealer, and his immediate perception of things "sous d'étranges couleurs" (33), overturn the clearness and emptiness of the casino into the chaos of a "tableau confus où les oeuvres humaines se heurtaient."⁵ The material juxtaposition of objects at the store, as well as the verbal antitheses describing them, hint at the analogous conflict of natural and supernatural which stems from this scene and which underlies the novel as a whole. Under the effect of his visionary experience, Raphael "sortit de la vie réelle, monta par degrés vers un monde idéal, et tomba dans une indéfinissable extase" (Balzac 35); however, he is constantly struggling to bring these sensations back to the logic of rationality, trying to decipher them according to the parameters of everyday life. The chain of uncanny images which follow one another as he progresses with his visit of the store evokes "les enchantemens d'un songe" (39) but presupposes at the same time physiological explanations: "le principe était sans doute dans une irrégulière circulation de son sang" (33), and its effects derive from the devastating action of fever and hunger. In the bazaar of human follies, "formes . . . étranges" and "créations merveilleuses" generate a liminal space which absorbs Raphael's perception: "doutant de son existence, il était, comme ces objets curieux, ni tout-à-fait mort, ni tout-à-fait vivant, . . . sur les frontières de la mort et de la vie" (39). At this stage of the novel, the experience of the threshold acquires a leading role, becoming the central metaphor not merely for the derangement of Raphael's senses but for the mechanism of interpretation itself: the disquieting figure of the antique dealer and the mysterious powers of the magic skin in-

validate the reality effects as the only parameters to normalize events, by creating an interplay of the ordinary and extraordinary, the two poles which delineate Raphael's mental oscillation.

"Les terreurs de la vie étaient impuissantes sur une âme familiarisée avec les terreurs de la mort": nothing seems to shake the protagonist's equilibrium after his painful inner struggles, and this sceptical attitude leads him to attribute the "caresse froide et digne des mystères de la tombe" (44) to the wings of a bat. However, no justification can be found for the sudden apparition of the *petit vieillard* surrounded by a sphere of blazing light, and announced by a terrible voice which Raphael can have either imagined under the effect of a nightmare or actually perceived. The "doute philosophique" (45) which characterizes the protagonist's hesitation vis-à-vis the nature of this extraordinary character is not dispelled after he recognizes "dans le vieillard une créature de chair, bien vivante, point fantasmagorique" (49). Far from excluding occult powers, the physical consistency of the antique dealer rather reinforces this possibility through the duplicity of his face, which recalls "soit une belle image du Père Eternel, soit le masque ricaneur de Méphistophélès" (47). Being a human figure endowed with supernatural features which stir both rapture and repulsion, he personifies the fantastic, the coexistence of the uncanny and the marvelous, arising exactly from the undecidability between the two. Although the atmosphere of the place as a whole is contaminated by and filtered through the visitor's emotion—which could explain the old man's frightful characteristics as a result of Raphael's hallucination—the *vieillard* is intrinsically ambiguous. Not simply "une espèce de fantôme" (45), and no longer transfigured by the protagonist's nervous tension, he engages in a dialogue with the visitor. However, he soon destabilizes the realistic code to which he seems to adhere, by revealing the magic skin and its unexplainable faculties.⁶

In the Paris of a Balzacian novel, "au dix-neuvième siècle, temps et lieu où la magie devait être impossible" (Balzac 48), Raphael cannot but look for a natural cause which explains the brightness of the talisman. "Comme un enfant pressé de connaître les innocens secrets de quelque nouveau jouet" (55), the realistic character aims at demystifying a phenomenon which challenges the logic of verisimilitude. However, the mathematical evidence of his demonstration finds its limit in the mischievous smile of superiority with which the antique dealer reinstates the fantastic quality of the skin. A story stems from

the mysterious words indelibly embedded in its tissue, which Raphael's rationality judges impossible, but which the subsequent events will prove to be undeniable. The "peau symbolique" (56) acquires a Lacanian connotation precisely for its connection with language, a language which, because of its "otherness," defies a translation into ordinary discourse. Actually, the decipherment of the inscription from Sanskrit to French does not eliminate the intellectual instability produced by the reading of its contents: the code of the fantastic implanted in the text of the skin opposes its strategy of incertitude and anxiety to the normalizing power of reason. Raphael abandons the "as if" convention of realistic aesthetics, and subscribes to a fatal contract which turns the engraved signs into symbols of the ontological relation between a character and an object, between "un mécanisme de chair et d'os animé par la volonté et qui fait un individu homme" (254) and "un morceau de chagrin . . . dont la dimension n'excède pas celle d'une peau de renard."⁷

In reply to the impotence underlying Raphael's death-wish, the skin provides "un mystérieux accord entre les destinées et les souhaits du possesseur" (Balzac 61), an occult fusion of *vouloir* and *pouvoir* which, however, does not immediately exert its effects. It is exactly the deferment of the talismanic powers, so far merely assumed through a verbal formula, which avoids the outright shift to the marvelous: confronted with a hypothesis which he can neither totally explain nor absolutely reject,⁸ Raphael is still trying to maintain a critical distance. The warnings of the old man against the destructive consequences of the pact have no direct influence upon the light-hearted attitude of the protagonist, "surpris et presque irrité de se voir toujours plaisant" (Balzac 61), but rather work as a prolepsis for the catastrophic events which take place after the retrospective narration of Raphael's life. Although it is the skin in his pocket which seems to provide the fulfilment of his first wishes, the intervention of magic is once again made ambiguous by its possible attribution to chance, namely, to the category of the *fantasque*. In line with the realistic turn of the novel, the laws of everyday logic still prevail.

The leap from the banquet scene to the memories of the protagonist epitomizes the awkward juxtaposition of realistic and fantastic effects in Balzac's text. However, the alleged incompatibility of the *étude de mœurs* with the events related to the magic skin, and the subsequent split of Balzac's text into self-contained parts,⁹ tend to neglect the elements of continuity between the two modes:

Raphael is a "desiring machine"¹⁰ even before the possession of the talisman, and the fatal contract with the skin intensifies the pact he has already signed with himself to seal his decision of "mourir pour vivre" (Balzac 127). Therefore, his past life contains the germs of two themes which, once developed to an excessive degree, contribute to the creation of the fantastic. Moreover, the explosion of his wishes at the antique dealer's shop represents the climactic reaction to a prolonged constraint which is dictated by the paternal law:

jusqu'à vingt-et-un ans j'ai été courbé sous un despotisme aussi froid que celui d'une règle monacale. Pour te révéler les tristesses de ma vie, il suffira peut-être de te dépeindre mon père. . . . Sa paternité planait au dessus de mes lutines et joyeuses pensées de manière à les enfermer sous un dôme de plomb. . . .(108)

The interdiction of the father is the first hindrance to Raphael's emotional freedom, which he himself additionally restricts when he shuts passions out with the door to his room, in order to write the *Théorie de la volonté*. Repressed desires return however, and the devastating effects of their "Faustian overreaching"¹¹ mark the transition from Raphael's realistic biography to a magical adventure, from the logic of verisimilitude to that of the fantastic: the supernatural powers of the skin literalize such a figurative expression as "j'aurais, en certains momens, donné ma vie pour une seule nuit" (Balzac 121), as well as any rhetorical and mechanical use of words connected with the semantic field of longing.¹² On a meta-narrative level, the dynamic underlying desire in *La Peau de chagrin* can be extended to the role of the fantastic vis-à-vis nineteenth-century tradition: not unlike the passions in Raphael's life, the fantastic is the repressed alter-ego of positivism and, more specifically, of Balzac's realistic writings. Therefore, the narrative of desire developed in this text is intertwined with the desire of a fantastic narrative which surfaces as an independent and rival literary genre (Brooks 316).

If the adventure of the skin constitutes the compensatory aftermath of Raphael's failure (Rudich 218), it also reverses his previous goal: "mourir pour vivre" becomes "je veux vivre maintenant!" (Balzac 229). Nevertheless, according to the paradoxical logic of the talisman, the realization of this utterance will coincide with the opposite effect: since the skin is "une antiphrase" (230) which shrinks proportionately at each desire, the fulfilment of such a global wish determines its total consumption and, consequently, the protagonist's

death. With the tyrannical accomplishment of his longings, the pen which marks the profile of the skin upon the white cloth also inscribes Raphael's agony, and the widening gap between the "lignes impitoyables et capricieuses" (238) becomes the tangible proof which convinces Raphael of the truth of the old man's premonition. The scepticism, which, in the first section of the novel, prevented him from taking the inscription seriously, is here replaced with an obsessive submission to the talismanic law, to the point that "il essayait de douter; mais un pressentiment anéantissait son incrédulité" (238). As if under the antithetical strategy of the skin, the effort to believe previously threatened by his mocking attitude, turns into a nostalgic longing for uncertainty. However it is annihilated by concrete results: "Il voyait clairement ce que chaque désir devait lui coûter de jours . . . il croyait à la peau de chagrin" (238).

Such a lack of intellectual vacillation creates another order in Raphael's mind. The satanic laugh of the *marchand de curiosité*—who appears at the side of Euphrasie as Raphael had playfully commanded—is the sound of the marvelous, of the supernatural accepted, and it disrupts the voice of science. Rationality, that which the protagonist had relied upon to dissipate any residue of mystery at the antique dealer's, is now at the mercy of a ruinous power. Against the indisputable shrinking of the skin, the "lois ordinaires de la zoologie" (287)—which Lacrampe, the wise man, invokes—reveal their inadequacy, and anticipate the more clamorous failure of M. Planchette's experiments. The explosion of the hydraulic press, meant to act upon the talisman's surface, is the concrete mark of the impossibility to compress an unknown phenomenon by reducing it to natural causes. With the defeat of science, the unexplainable bond tying the skin and Raphael's life is reaffirmed: if physics and chemistry provide no remedy to the contraction of the *morceau de peau d'âne*, medicine is equally powerless when confronted with the character's physical degeneration. The supernatural "coïncidence entre . . . désirs et . . . rétrécissement" (312) which enslaves Raphael, remains unscathed and unquestioned until the end of the novel, when the deferment of his suicide finds its resolution. With the fulfilment of his final wish—the union with Pauline—the protagonist can read his death sentence in the last fragment of the magic skin, "fragile et petit comme une feuille de saule" (356).

From intellectual detachment to emotional obsession, the parabola of Raphael's attitude towards the obscure logic of the magic skin

progressively abandons the realm of the *fantasque* to join the *fantasmagorique*: the contract he signs with the skin, now devoid for him of any constitutional ambiguity, subdues him to a demonic power he no longer denies. Since the oscillation between the two poles has finally determined the predominance of one of them, the fantastic effect of Raphael's experience—located on the border separating the uncanny and the marvelous—seems to have evaporated.¹³ However, the character's perception and interpretation of events, as Todorov underlines, do not constitute the decisive source for the fantastic: it is the reader's own hesitation which promotes it. It is on the meta-narrative level that *La Peau de chagrin* maintains doubt alive. The unachieved dialogue following the conclusion of the events inserts an additional voice which reinstates the interpretative openness of Balzac's text: the unanswered questions raised in the last two pages epitomize the conceptual gaps which hinder a facile acceptance of either the natural or the supernatural.

2. *Imagination de poète* and *peau des chagrins*: the fantastic in danger.

For the reader who replaces Raphael in the interpretation of events, the novel literalizes further threats to the survival of the fantastic. If the diegesis has shifted from *fantasque* to *fantasmagorique*—thus leading the protagonist to a choice which erases his hesitation—on the meta-narrative level, then the permanent uncertainty, which the fantastic requires from the reader, clashes with two possible kinds of naturalization, namely, a poetic and an allegorical approach to the text.

Analogously to Raphael's recollection of his past experiences, *La Peau de chagrin* as a whole can be taken "comme une orgie de paroles, de mots sans idées . . ." (Balzac 232). The protagonist's account of reality often consists in a combination of words working in their literal sense to the detriment of actual events, thus thematizing the lack of referentiality which underlies a poetic interpretation (Todorov 60). Raphael, a poet himself, embodies such an approach, which the novel exemplifies in the numerous references to the activity of writing. The literariness of literature filters a neutral description of his perceptions, so that the "océans de meubles, d'inventions, de modes, d'oeuvres, de ruines" which are part of his hallucinatory experience at the antique dealer's "lui composait un poème sans fin" (Balzac 37). From a model which the work of art has to reproduce,

everyday life becomes textualized. In Raphael's "imagination de poète" (198), actual episodes and people surrounding him are defined in aesthetic terms. For example: the banquet scene is at once "un livre et un tableau" (75); Aquilina is vaguely comparable to "une tragédie de Shakespeare" (93); and the representation of Foedora as a French *blason du corps féminin* is built upon artistic analogies, for Raphael found "la passion empreinte en tout, l'amour écrit sur ces paupières italiennes, sur ces belles épaules dignes de la Vénus de Milo. . . . Il y avait certes tout un roman dans cette femme!" (151). In the seclusion of his room, the protagonist, struggling to achieve his literary work, transfigures the environment with his inspiration. The words which allow him to express "des pensées presque intraduisibles" also recreate the most common objects, shifting from denotation to connotation: "à force de contempler ces objets, je leur trouvais une physionomie, un caractère, et ils me parlaient souvent" (133). The thematization of writing and of its material support in the novel marks the characters' descriptions, thus questioning their representative function: Raphael's father "avait l'air d'un hareng saur enveloppé dans la couverture rougeâtre d'un *pamphlet*" (108-9), and M. Porriquet, Raphael's former teacher, appears as a "figure . . . accompagnée de longs cheveux gris en désordre et desséchée comme un *vieux parchemin* qui se tord dans le feu" (243).

According to the reading of the text as a "poème vivant" (223), which Raphael's attitude promotes, the role of the magic skin is reduced to the literal effects of an antiphrasis exchanging the protagonist's life not so much for the content of his longings as for "the word of desire" (Weber 119). If the decisive element in this pact is not the protagonist's intention but rather his utterance *à la lettre*, the logic of the talisman sanctions the crisis of representation: as in Raphael's orgy of words without ideas, the object is cut off from its verbal evocation.

However, the literalization of events stemming from the skin as "antiphrase" (Balzac 230) is opposed to an allegorization of the novel as a whole, hinging upon the idea of the skin as a "fatal symbole du destin" (280). In this respect, the texture of *La Peau de chagrin* veils another level of meaning which, in Todorov's analysis, reduces the talisman to a metaphor for life and a metonymy for desire (Todorov 67), and works as a leitmotif for the entire plot. Starting from the opening idea of "une parabole" (Balzac 17) until the final relation between Foedora and society, a figurative meaning is superimposed

upon the literal value of numerous episodes and characters in the text. The novel exhibits its exemplary function even before the narration begins. The winding line in the title page leading back to "STERNE. *Tristram Shandy*, ch. CCCXXII"¹⁴ already establishes a connection between the actual image and a general meaning. For Balzac, the meandering curve stands for human life, a "drame qui serpente, ondule, tournoie et au courant duquel il faut s'abandonner comme le dit la très spirituelle épigraphe du livre."¹⁵ The turns of the trajectory reveal the *détours* of the novel and anticipate the zigzag of Raphael's destiny, not subdued to the logic of rationality but rather to the law of the talisman. Therefore, the wild ass' skin becomes "la peau des chagrins," the material support from which the protagonist can read his own consumption under the yoke of desire.

Throughout the narration several other images work similarly, and thus reinstate their allegorical quality. The old man at the gambling house epitomizes "la passion réduite à son terme le plus simple" (Balzac 18): being "le Jeu incarné," he embodies one of the objects of Raphael's longings, which the extended paternal interdiction has intensified. Similarly, his encounter with the women during the banquet becomes charged with figurative meaning: the "drame sanglant" (92), which each of them could recount, conveys at the same time the literal effect of Aquilina's experience—her lover's execution on the guillotine—and the indirect allusion to the contiguity of death and woman, the two principles which decree Raphael's fate. In line with Balzac's exploitation of antithetic values, Aquilina contrasts with Euphrasie as "l'âme du vice" clashing with "le vice sans âme" (95), both being vehicles for the expression of abstract qualities which affect the protagonist's behaviour after his demonic pact. The play of similarity and difference between the two female characters, while reducing them to "images vives et originales de la folie" (101), equally sanctions Aquilina's incarnation as "la joie humaine" (93) and Euphrasie's transfiguration "par une sinistre allégorie" (95) offering a portrait of cold corruption—while a new name, Foedora, represents Raphael's desires and the theme of his life. It is in these contradictions that the idea of the protagonist's existence as a cruel antithesis finds its constant support, and it is in this light that the skin as antiphrasis becomes its allegorization.

Both poetic and allegorical readings of *La Peau de chagrin* undermine the reality effects of Balzac's writing and, transitively, its potentially fantastic nature which depends on them. However, the

interpretation of the text in terms of a mere syntactical arrangement of words, sustained by the thematization of literariness through the protagonist's "imagination de poète" (198), reaches an impasse when Raphael's poetic voice is confronted with the referentiality of the scientific code: albeit sceptically and without solving the mysterious phenomenon, the doctors have to acknowledge that "cette peau se rétrécit réellement" (315). The same power of the pen which promotes the protagonist's activity as a writer also frames his existence by tracing on the cloth the fatal lines circumscribing the shrinking skin. Therefore, his death works as an actual event in the novel, one which retrospectively puts into question "la valeur nominale des paroles, des idées" (163).

With its shift to figurative language, the alternative interpretation of *La Peau de chagrin* in terms of "indirect allegory"—which Todorov sustains¹⁶—implies a transparent and exhaustive connection linking the two levels of signification, namely, the logic of the magic skin and the realm of actual life, the combination of words in the inscription and the unfolding of Raphael's desire. In fact, there is a residual voice which disrupts this correspondence at the very moment it becomes tautological: when both the talisman and the human life it represents are reduced to nothing, Pauline's disquieting laugh and her last exclamation—"Il est à moi! . . . je l'ai tué! . . . Ne l'avais-je pas prédit? . . ." (Balzac 358)—redefine the female role from angel to demon, and introduce another equally mysterious source for Raphael's death. From her first, vague prediction earlier in the novel to the final, triumphant comment on her lover's destruction, Pauline sets in motion a cryptic plot mechanism parallel to the law of the skin, which, however, is not even unfolded in the "Conclusion."

The reiterated open questions after the text of the novel thwart the reader's desire of naturalization. Balzac's disseminated allegories in *La Peau de chagrin* work against their own function: they hint at a revelation which the epilogue does not fulfil; they promise and deny the decipherment of its enigma. Significant in this respect is the unattainable etymology of the name "chagrin": the meaning of the talisman is built upon a "mystérieuse origine" (285) which the scientists cannot recover.

3. *Oui et non*: the black hole of the fantastic.

Although Pauline's prophetic powers and her lethal influence on Raphael render her "une figure surnaturelle" (358) whose meaning

is problematized, the novel suggests at the same time a physical explanation for the protagonist's death, by hinting repeatedly at his illness: "Ne suis-je pas pulmonique? . . . Ma mère n'est-elle pas morte de la poitrine?" (238) The symptoms of tuberculosis which make Pauline perceive "le hideux squelette de la MORT" (309) under his livid face, actually interfere, in the final scene, with the idea of corporal decay provoked by the magical effect of the skin. The unresolved confrontation between these two options casts doubts on the Faustian nature of the pact itself, by implying a mere mechanical shrinking of the talisman, not connected with Raphael's death. Further details in the text partake of the same ambivalence between two orders of explanations. Although apparently distinct, both the old man at the gambling house and the antique dealer are presented as *petits vieillards*, thus calling into being an uncanny process of doubling which equally connects the antique dealer with the Auvergne farmer because of their common age of 102; similarly, the death of Raphael's rival in the duel scene can either result from a desire secretly formulated in the protagonist's mind and fulfilled by the skin, or be ascribed to his fear vis-à-vis Raphael's "sécurité sur-naturelle" (335).

"A une époque où tout s'explique, . . . dans un siècle de lumière, où nous avons appris que les diamans n'étaient que du carbon solide" (281), Balzac's novel questions the parameters of objectivity and rationality through a combination of "cas" and "devinette."¹⁷ The investigation into the events—which should culminate in a decision about their nature—does not lead to a definite solution but rather to the perplexity embedded in the fantastic, to that oscillation between "oui et non" (102) which the reader experiences when confronted, like Raphael, with another order of norms grafted onto everyday data. The contrast of the uncanny and the marvelous, of *fantasque* and *fantasmagorique*, underlying the attempted interpretations of the skin throughout the plot, determines the point of convergence of the *thétique* and *non-thétique* (Bessière 37). Balzac's fantastic strategy merges an empirical, realistic motivation of events with a non-realistic probability, and establishes a paradoxical dialogue between their respective voices, namely, the scientific and the supernatural codes. A mere passage from the former to the latter would replace the *cas* with the *devinette*: the inquiry into reality based on a cause and effect criterion would lead to the decipherment of its cryptic sig-

nification according to an allegorical key, as Todorov's analysis suggests. In fact, *La Peau de chagrin* results from their coexistence: if "Cuvier . . . est . . . le plus grand poète de notre siècle," who awakens "le néant sans prononcer de paroles grandement magiques" (Balzac 42), the wild ass' skin is treated as a mineral in the hands of chemistry. It is the exchange between the two codes which promotes the antinomy of the fantastic in Balzac's text: when the impossible breaks into the rigid structure of plausibility, thus invalidating the principle of experimentation, the two conflicting codes intertwine to the point of undecidability. The skin, as antiphrasis embodying such a contrast, shrinks to the point of vanishing into its center: like a black hole, it absorbs contradictions and entraps within itself the solution to the play of *thétique* and *non-thétique*.

As the "parfaite machine à raconter" (Bessière 26), Balzac's fantastic novel narrates a story of discontinuity and uncertainty; it represents reality by problematizing its norms, by testing the law of verisimilitude as the skin threatens the scientific logic of naturalization. The French realistic author *par excellence*, whose *Comédie Humaine* hinges upon the homology between the structures of the work of art and those of the social milieu, also writes a destabilizing version of such a connection. Therefore, the intersection of the code of causality with that of the supernatural in the fantastic space of *La Peau de chagrin* becomes, on the meta-narrative level, the dialogue of Balzac's two personae, a further paradoxical discourse which asserts the positivistic faith in explanation and simultaneously neutralizes it by juxtaposing with it an "other" order of signification which rationality cannot grasp. It is exactly this essayistic strategy that the story of the talisman sets in motion. Far from any heuristic finality, the novel leaves the *cas* of the magic skin unsolved and articulates a *devinette* granting no access to its unknown logic.

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Notes

1. Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990) 1.

2. Honoré de Balzac, "Préface" to *La Peau de chagrin* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1984) 9. My emphasis. This edition reproduces the original one of 1831.

3. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic* (New York: Cornell UP, 1975) 41. Unlike Todorov's corresponding genres, the terms *fantasque*, *fantastique*, and *fantasmagorique* in Balzac's text do not define three rigorously distinct categories from the beginning. Especially in the case of the *fantastique*, the novel does not refer to a self-contained domain. However, in the light of Todorov's theory, Balzac's use of such terms provides new insight into the events of *La Peau de chagrin*: the alternation of the *fantasque* and *fantasmagorique* reflects the unresolved ambiguity between the uncanny and the marvelous, which is the origin of the fantastic.

4. *Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la langue française* 758.

5. Samuel Weber, *Unwrapping Balzac. A Reading of "La Peau de chagrin"* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979) 35.

6. In these terms, the fantastic nature of the antique dealer is not merely due to his connection with the repulsive or grotesque quality of the objects he is selling, "des choses qui ont cessé d'être attendrissantes ou désuètes pour s'animer d'une vie propre, féroce ou répugnante," as Louis Vax observes. In fact, the character himself participates in the supernatural realm, in that he possesses the secret of the talisman which will manipulate Raphael's life. Louis Vax, *La séduction de l'étrange* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965) 73.

7. Roland Le Huenen, "La sémiotique du corps dans *La Peau de chagrin*: le tout et le fragment" *Le roman de Balzac* (Paris: Didier, 1980) 55.

8. René Quinsat, "Réalisme et fantastique balzaciens" *Europe* 611 (1980) 50.

9. For Linda Rudich, the novel is to be considered *réaliste* from the first chapter to Raphael's agony—the moment which marks the development of the fantastic and prolongs it until the end. This perspective inevitably overlooks the pivotal events at the antique dealer's, which in fact disrupt the purity of the realistic code, and constitute the starting point of a parabola leading to the protagonist's destruction. Linda Rudich, "Une interprétation de *La Peau de chagrin*," *L'Année Balzacienne* (Paris: Garnier, 1971) 207.

The fantastic effects of *La Peau de chagrin* are totally sacrificed for the sake of realism in Pierre Barbéris, *Balzac et le mal du siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) (ii) 1415-1613. It is an accurate study of Balzac's novel in relation to the *mal du siècle* but it reduces the text to a historical document accounting for "la société d'avant et . . . d'après la révolution de Juillet."

10. Peter Brooks, "Narrative Desire" *Style* 18 (1984) 312.

11. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981) 130.

12. My emphasis. For the literalization of figurative expressions as one of the features of the fantastic, see Todorov 79.

13. Such an observation does not coincide with Yvonne Bargues-Rollins' assertion in "Une 'Danse macabre': du fantastique au grotesque dans *La Peau de chagrin*" *Romantisme* 48 (1985) 33-46. She finds that Raphael's adherence to the grotesque quality of the magic skin "confirme son échec en tant que héros fantastique." Although in the last part of the text the protagonist's reactions present an undeniable departure from the fantastic, Bargues-Rollins underlines for the total length of the novel "l'insignifiance du héros qui ne questionne jamais le jeu de la raison et de la déraison." Such a simplistic account of Raphael's attitudes totally neglects the protagonist's continuous struggle to interpret the events according either to rationality or to such a different, unknown logic as the supernatural. It is exactly his mental and emotional

involvement which sets in motion the evolution from the uncanny to the fantastic and to the marvellous.

14. Such an epigraph does not appear in the original version of the novel. The trajectory which in Sterne's text describes the movement of *caporal* Trim's cane, develops progressively from a serpentine shape to a real snake in later editions of *La Peau de chagrin*. (See, for instance, the 1920 Grevin edition).

15. Honoré de Balzac in *La Caricature*, 11 août 1831, quoted in Raissa Reznik, "Sur l'Épigraph de *La Peau de chagrin*" *L'Année Balzacienne* (Paris: Garnier, 1972) 372.

16. Todorov, *op. cit.* Other critics also find, in allegory, the main explanation for Balzac's text. Cf. Pierre Bayard, *Balzac et le troc de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1978); Marcel Schneider, *La littérature fantastique en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1964) 175.

17. Irène Bessière, *Le récit fantastique* (Paris: Larousse, 1974) 22-23.

Une lecture des *Larmes d'Eros*, ou une autre "nécessité de l'impossible"

Jean Mainil

Je m'enfoncerai dans un ensemble
dont la cohésion pourra
m'apparaître à la fin . . . (Bataille)

Ecrire sur Bataille, c'est, comme le dit Derrida, "une nécessité de l'impossible."¹ Comment peut-on en effet "dire dans le langage—de la servilité—ce qui n'est pas servile"? Puisqu' "il faut parler" pour "garder la souveraineté" de la parole de Bataille, pour en distinguer le possible "non-sens" de "toute négativité," nous voilà contraints à l' "'impossible' commentaire" (385). Le discours critique sur l'oeuvre de Bataille devient donc impossible *et* nécessaire. Mais comment penser la pluralité, la fragmentation de la pensée et de l'écriture de Bataille sans la com-prendre, sans l'entasser, sans l'asservir à un système sans cesse tenté par la totalisation? Comment, dirait Sichère, "ne pas engager sa propre limite dans une telle lecture, dans une telle pensée?"² Comment ne pas expurger du texte tout ce qui dé-range sa taxinomie? Comment en rendre compte sans en faire la somme? Comment de plus éviter de tomber dans la connaissance absolue d'un texte qui refuse justement cette position? Comment réconcilier l'oeuvre de Bataille avec notre désir d'en parler qui, selon Kristeva, serait, comme tout désir, cette "négation de l'objet dans son altérité ou comme 'vie indépendante' et son introduction dans le sujet connaissant?"³ Quelle stratégie trouver pour résister à notre désir d'enfermer Bataille dans un discours significatif totalisant?

Le discours de Bataille présente deux écueils, nous tend un piège à deux niveaux. La parole inscrit le non-savoir, la perte à l'intérieur d'un discours que l'on pourrait qualifier de significatif, mais il est d'autre part difficile de résister à la perte de sens, à la dissolution soudaine du discours qui *s'abîme*, sans chercher une fuite, sans refuser ce vertige qui nous prend face au néant, à la disparition de sens. La première "solution" (dans le sens où on chercherait une dissolution de ce sentiment de vertige, de nausée) consisterait à rassembler les textes de Bataille en un ensemble ("l'oeuvre") à l'intérieur duquel le vertige ne s'inscrirait que comme moment passager qui se dissoudrait dans son intégration à un système cohérent. La seconde stratégie pourrait nous conduire à établir à l'intérieur d'un seul texte une totalisation similaire, et à refondre le discours de Bataille, en remplissant ce qui "manquerait," en prenant soin de reconnaître les moments d'accession au non-sens, mais en les comblant d'un sens qui serait *ailleurs* dans le texte. Pour ne pas éviter le piège tendu par le vide, l'abîme, le vertige il faudrait donc analyser un seul texte, et pour éviter une totalisation de ce texte, il faudrait ménager à l'intérieur de notre discours un espace qui serait libre à défaut d'être infini, un espace où la pensée pourrait se développer à travers sa propre naissance, au-delà de sa propre mort. Mais comment ouvrir, créer cet espace?

Pour parler de l'oeuvre de Bataille, nous pourrions, par exemple, adopter une parole mimétique et créer un texte où s'opposent "discours significatif" et "parole poétique, extatique, sacrée," opposition qui, selon Derrida, serait "cette parole de souveraineté," celle de Bataille (Economie 383). Pour sortir de l'impasse, l'"'impossible' commentaire" glisserait lui aussi dans un domaine au-delà de la stricte formulation. Il semblerait que nombre de critiques de Bataille aient adopté ce discours. Chez eux, l'utilisation de métaphores essaye d'emporter le discours significatif à un niveau où le fragmentaire possible renaît, de rendre à toute inter-prétation son caractère transitoire, inter-médiaire: il y aurait "non révélation d'un être déjà-là, mais production" (Sichère 66). Il y aurait dans cet espace métaphorique la possibilité d'expliquer le texte de Bataille, plutôt que de l'exprimer: nous pourrions en déployer les contours méta-phoriquement plutôt qu'en extraire l'essence rationnellement.

Le texte de Bataille que j'ai choisi de lire ici combine un discours de "raison" à un parler érotique qui le fait en quelque sorte exploser de l'intérieur. Il s'agit du dernier texte que Bataille publia de son vi-

vant, et qui reste dans l'ombre d'oeuvres plus "théoriques" telles que *L'Érotisme*.⁴ Il est vrai que Bataille s'y réfère à d'autres oeuvres qui seraient plus "complètes," plus "finies," et en quelque sorte nous invite lui-même à considérer *Les Larmes d'Eros* comme une partie d'un discours plus large, de "l'oeuvre" dans son ensemble. Il avoue notamment "dans un exposé rapide, représenter les faits dans leur ensemble" et se voit "obligé de remettre à un autre ouvrage le développement auquel se lie [son] affirmation (du fait d'un caractère philosophique inévitable)."⁵ Le but du texte, d'autre part, est d'ouvrir "à la conscience de soi" (620), de "rendre sensible le glissement de l'érotisme sans mesure à l'érotisme conscient" (624, je souligne). En tant que sensibilisation à ce qui est proprement humain et qui nous définit, ce texte naît, se construit de sa propre fragmentation, de ses propres cendres, celles dans lesquelles Bataille semble avoir voulu nous l'offrir.

Dans une première partie, j'essayerai d'abord d'expliquer, de "déplier" *Les Larmes d'Eros*. Je me concentrerai sur le discours de "raison" à l'intérieur duquel s'inscrit l'érotisme du texte et cernerai, grâce à une analyse détaillée, un espace métaphorique. Dans une seconde partie, j'analyserai, à l'intérieur de l'espace dégagé, les métaphores spécifiquement spatiales que certains critiques (Foucault, Barthes et Fourny) ont utilisées pour parler de l'oeuvre, de la parole de Bataille.

Je vous parlerai, donc, d'une lecture.

Dans son "Avant-Propos," Bataille nous déclare que l'"origine" des rapports de l'érotisme et de la morale nous est donnée "dans les rapports de l'érotisme et des superstitions les plus lointaines de la religion" (575), et que si nous voulons étudier ces rapports et comprendre leur position aujourd'hui, nous devons remonter le cours du temps, de l'histoire. Il affirme d'autre part que notre condition humaine nous empêche d'exclure le "désir brûlant" au profit du "calcul réfléchi de la raison" (575). Ces deux premières propositions se renforcent mutuellement pour rendre impossible tout discours de la raison: la deuxième exclut la possibilité de donner tout pouvoir à la rationalité, mais même la première, qui fait appel à une logique linéaire et accumulative, contient sa propre contradiction. En effet, nous sommes inclus dans l'objet de notre étude, et puisque "nous" sommes cet objet, notre vision n'aura lieu que de l'intérieur et notre parole ne résonnera donc que dans les limites de notre écoute hu-

maine. Le texte des *Larmes d'Eros* est à l'image de ces tensions: jamais, le désir ne peut être exclu, même lorsqu'on crée une opposition binaire (raison/histoire linéaire vs. désir/discours érotique) qui semble donner un territoire exclusif à la rationalité. La parole de Bataille, paradoxale, discordante, est aussi "absurde" (575) que les rapports entre la morale et le désir.

Cette parole serait non seulement le discours de la raison *et* celui de la passion, mais elle naîtrait au moment où l'une empiète sur l'autre. Elle est le lieu de ce mélange, de cette défaillance des frontières qui les séparent, de ce chevauchement, elle est la *transgression* de la raison par l'érotisme ou de l'érotisme par la raison. Le propos de Bataille est de comprendre "l'humain" en scrutant les rapports entre la raison et l'érotisme. Mais vu la défaillance de l'opposition qu'il construit, si nous voulons comprendre l'humain tel qu'il se définit par l'érotisme, il faut subir cet "affolement" érotique de la transgression, du désir brûlant, qui s'immisce dans la parole rationnelle et "froide." Il faut mettre en scène la transgression. C'est ce que fait le texte de Bataille lorsqu'il affirme que "*l'essence de l'homme fût-elle donnée dans la sexualité—qui en est l'origine et le commencement—lui pose un problème qui n'a d'issue que l'affolement*" (576). Si l'érotisme nous "fonde," on pourrait en effet espérer qu'il comble une quête de l'origine et nous donne un Sens, une essence. Or pour Bataille, la découverte de cette "origine" entraîne nécessairement l'"affolement." Et cet affolement, qui devient, en quelque sorte l'essence absolue, est le lieu où raison et érotisme, désormais indissociables, transgressent tous deux leurs limites en même temps.

Le même "affolement" ne va pas manquer d'avoir lieu si on lit *Les Larmes d'Eros* comme un texte dont la logique évolutionniste voudrait rendre compte de l'histoire de l'érotisme. Le rapport entre le discours de "raison" évolutionniste de Bataille et l'érotisme, comme le rapport entre raison et érotisme, est "affolant." Bataille affirme qu'il veut "rendre sensible le glissement de l'érotisme sans mesure à l'érotisme conscient" (624) et qu'il ne peut le faire qu'en remontant le cours de l'histoire: "Il serait inutile de chercher à comprendre l'érotisme, si nous ne pouvions parler de ce qu'il fut à l'origine" (590). Nous ne pourrions comprendre notre érotisme si nous ne le placions pas dans le contexte de son évolution: "Inutile d'insister: seule la succession des moments s'éclaire. Un moment n'a de sens que par rapport à l'ensemble des moments. Nous ne sommes chaque fois que des fragments dépourvus de sens si nous ne les rapportons à d'autres

fragments" (625). *Les Larmes d'Eros* remonte à l'Homo Faber, l'Homo Sapiens, passe par l'Antiquité, le Christianisme, le Moyen-Age, le Maniérisme, le Libertinage avant d'atteindre l'"Epoque Moderne." Et la structure même du texte reflète cet évolutionnisme. Nous commençons la lecture par un "Avant-Propos," passons par "Le Commencement" (Première Partie), "La Fin" (Deuxième partie), avant d'arriver à la clôture intitulée "En Guise de Conclusion." La structure du texte semble donc projeter et refléter l'"ensemble du temps" (625) qu'il est nécessaire de considérer pour comprendre le présent. Mais, pris dans ces termes, le discours serait aussi une accumulation, une somme annoncée par une introduction, et à laquelle se superpose une conclusion. Mais "personne n'imagine un monde où la passion brûlante cesserait décidément de nous troubler . . ." (575). Le discours de Bataille, s'il se résumait à ce principe évolutionniste serait donc du domaine de "l'inimaginable." Comment un discours de raison, bâti sur un principe évolutionniste, c'est-à-dire d'accumulation et de travail sédimentaire, pourrait-il rendre compte de la dépense, de la perte? Si, comme Bataille le dit, "parlant dans les limites utilitaires de la raison, nous percevons le sens pratique et la nécessité du désordre sexuel" (587), quand percevons-nous à l'intérieur de son propre discours de raison, l'apparition de la perte, du désordre, de la transgression, de l'érotisme? L'érotisme défini en termes de "perte," de "dépense," n'y serait pas représenté. Pour saisir le caractère humain, érotique et rationnel de ce discours brûlant et froid, il nous faut maintenant analyser les ruptures possibles du cadre, la "violence du dépassement" (576) faite aux "limites utilitaires de la raison" (586).

La rupture de l'espace discursif de la raison se fait à deux niveaux: au niveau de la parole (qui se voudrait systématiquement "scientifique"), et au niveau de la structure linéaire (dont la rigueur elle aussi se veut scientifique) dans laquelle cette parole est insérée. Avant d'analyser les endroits où la parole qui s'annonce comme scientifique explose d'un "excès de transports" (577) qui la brise et la pulvérise, je vais analyser ce que j'appellerai l'auto-subversion du cadre herméneutique. Dans la première partie du "Commencement" ("La Conscience de la mort"), Bataille nous révèle que l'"aspect essentiel de ce que les recherches préhistoriques apportent à la connaissance" est "la naissance de cette émotion extrême, que nous désignons sous le nom d'érotisme, et qui oppose l'homme à l'animal" (584). C'est par la connaissance de la mort que l'humain se différencie de l'animal, et "c'est

à partir de cette connaissance que l'érotisme apparut, qui oppose la vie sexuelle de l'homme à celle de l'animal" (584). L'humain a peur de la mort, de cette "violence" étrangère à "l'ordre reçu" (585). C'est par cette violence que nous subissons et dont nous avons conscience que naît l'érotisme: c'est "du fait que nous sommes humains, et que nous vivons dans la sombre perspective de la mort, que nous connaissons la violence exaspérée, la violence désespérée de l'érotisme" (586). Nous pouvons donc postuler que "la conscience de la mort" et l'érotisme qui en découle définissent l'humain en le séparant de l'animal.

Dans la deuxième partie du "Commencement" intitulée "Le travail et le jeu," Bataille émet au sujet de notre origine "humaine" une autre théorie. Rappelant qu'il serait "inutile de chercher à comprendre l'érotisme si nous ne pouvions parler de ce qu'il fut à l'origine" (590), Bataille postule le travail (et non plus la connaissance de la mort) comme étant le fondement de notre dissociation de l'animal:

Mais si, voulant comprendre l'homme en général, je veux en particulier comprendre l'érotisme, une première obligation s'impose à moi: tout d'abord, je dois donner la première place au travail. D'un bout à l'autre de l'histoire, en effet, la première place appartient au travail. (590)

Un peu plus loin, Bataille déclare: "Je ne puis dans les limites de ce livre rendre plus clair le caractère initial, décisif, du travail" (594). Après avoir insisté sur le caractère initial de la connaissance de la mort et de l'érotisme, Bataille déclare maintenant que "bien entendu, c'est le travail qui dégagea l'homme de l'animalité initiale," que "c'est par le travail que l'animal devint humain," et que "le travail fut *avant tout* le fondement de la connaissance et de la raison" (592, je souligne). Est-ce en fin de compte la connaissance de la mort et l'érotisme ou le travail qui sépare l'homme de l'animal? Comment réunir, com-prendre que "le singe diffère essentiellement de l'homme en ce qu'il n'a pas la connaissance de la mort" (585) et que "c'est évidemment le travail qui de lui [l'homme] fit l'être humain, l'animal raisonnable que nous sommes" (591)? Y aurait-il contradiction?

Bataille ne se décide pas, à l'intérieur de ce texte, à isoler une origine (par définition unique) de notre "essence." Mais est-ce pour autant un discours paradoxal qu'il nous tient? Si nous ne considérons que les déclarations de Bataille sur sa méthode (il faut considérer un fragment dans le contexte d'autres fragments, il faut remonter à l'origine pour comprendre notre essence aujourd'hui),

nous pourrions lui faire le reproche de ne pas appliquer la méthode évolutionniste, scientifique qu'il nous promet (et annonce comme étant la seule valable). D'autre part, si nous nous souvenons qu'il affirme qu'il y a en nous cohabitation, symbiose entre la raison et le désir, nous pouvons voir dans le discours de Bataille une parole mimétique, une parole humaine, elle-même constituée de désir et de raison, "au-dessus de la précision historique" (575).

Dirons-nous en fin de compte que la parole de Bataille est contradictoire? Il semblerait que la notion de contradiction implique une grille de lecture elle-même totalisante. Alors que la parole de Bataille avance, remonte le cours de l'histoire, nous remontons nous-mêmes le cours de sa parole pour relever les failles logiques que Bataille, lui, ne résout pas. Mais cette parole va plus loin; ou plutôt, elle va de l'avant tandis que nous voilà coincés dans un mouvement de recul dans le texte. Nous voilà croyants nous aussi que la parole ne peut être comprise que dans le contexte de son passé. Nous voilà invoquant des pré-textes explicatifs. Nous voilà dans la transgression de notre lecture, refusant le sens du discours. Devrions-nous écouter la parole de Bataille d'une autre oreille? La "raison" de Bataille aurait parlé sans qu'on ne l'entende? De fait, elle est au rendez-vous:

Mais s'il est vrai que le travail est l'origine, s'il est vrai que le travail est la clé de l'humanité, les hommes, à partir du travail, s'éloignèrent entièrement, à la longue, de l'animalité. Ils s'en éloignèrent en particulier sur le plan de la vie sexuelle. Ils avaient d'abord adapté dans le travail leur activité à l'utilité qu'ils lui assignaient. Mais ce ne fut pas seulement sur le plan du travail qu'ils se développèrent: c'est dans l'ensemble de leur vie qu'ils firent répondre leurs gestes et leur conduite à une fin poursuivie. (591)

Bataille ne résout pas ce que nous avons perçu comme une contradiction. Au contraire, son discours avance, rassemble et combine en une interprétation possible les éléments discordants qui le constituent. Le discours du possible ("s'il est vrai . . .") a remplacé la totalisation scientifique ("*bien entendu*, c'est le travail qui dégagée l'homme de l'animalité initiale" ou "*c'est évidemment* le travail qui de lui fit l'être humain" [591, je souligne]). Nous voilà au-dessus de la précision historique. Nous avons quitté le domaine scientifique et nous avançons, pas à pas dans les "sciences humaines." Bataille interprète le travail et l'érotisme comme étant basés sur la recherche de moyens destinés à atteindre le but poursuivi. Nous pouvons donc

dire que la synthèse de ces deux éléments (érotisme et travail) va au-delà de ses composantes.

Mais ne nous méprenons pas à l'apparente simplicité de cette synthétisation. En effet, examinons la façon dont la pensée se déplace. Bataille a d'abord postulé que l'essence humaine est définie par la connaissance de la mort et par l'érotisme. Mais c'est aussi le travail qui nous fonde. Bataille conclut donc, qu'en fait, c'est la recherche de moyens pour atteindre un but qui nous définit car seule cette recherche est commune à nos deux essences. La conduite rationnelle qui nous pousse à adapter nos moyens en fonction d'un but constituerait donc notre quintessence. D'autre part, cette quintessence implique que nous étions des êtres rationnels avant de devenir l'objet de désirs brûlants. A l'origine, l'homme est donc un être rationnel; mais par un raisonnement similaire à celui qu'il applique au travail (la recherche d'une fin par des moyens) l'homme transforme aussi la sexualité instinctive des animaux en une "recherche calculée de transports voluptueux" (592), c'est-à-dire en érotisme. Dès le début de notre histoire, à l'endroit même où l'on recherche l'origine de l'érotisme et de sa définition par la distinction entre érotisme et travail, il y avait donc contamination de l'érotisme par le travail.

Il semblerait que le travail et l'érotisme aient des buts similaires. Souvenons-nous que c'est la notion de travail qui fonde notre érotisme. Cependant, comme le remarque Bataille, le travail et l'érotisme ont des buts diamétralement opposés. Tandis que le travail est fondé sur le "désir d'une acquisition, d'un accroissement" (592), l'érotisme vise à la "perte" (592), à la dépense. Selon Bataille, intervient ici une autre influence: celle de l'érotisme sur le travail. En effet, alors que la recherche d'une fin nous avait séparés de l'animal et avait fait naître l'érotisme, c'est à présent l'érotisme qui entraîne le travail dans le domaine de l'inutile, de la perte: "A la fin, ce n'est pas le travail, *mais le jeu*, qui décida lorsque l'oeuvre d'art s'accomplit et que le travail devint, en partie, dans d'authentiques chefs-d'oeuvres, autre chose qu'une réponse au souci de l'utilité" (594). C'est, en fin de compte, l'art, le travail inutile, qui couronne notre achèvement.

Si nous reprenons brièvement la pensée de Bataille pour en définir l'évolution, nous voyons comment Bataille organise des éléments qui, dès le début cohabitent, dans l'homme comme dans le discours: le travail et l'érotisme. Après la première contamination de la sexualité par le travail, c'est le travail qui subit l'influence de l'érotisme et

devient art. Il ne s'agit pas vraiment d'une évolution linéaire, mais plutôt circulaire. Cependant, nous n'en revenons jamais à la conception du travail tel qu'il nous définit au début. La parole, ici, évolue dans un mouvement que Blanchot décrit comme un "redoublement":

la parole est divisée, redoublée: ce qui est dit une fois d'un côté, est redit une deuxième fois de l'autre côté et non pas seulement réaffirmé, mais (parce qu'il y a reprise) élevé à une forme d'affirmation nouvelle où, changeant de place, la chose dite entre en rapport avec sa différence, devient plus aiguë, plus tragique, non pas plus unifiée, mais au contraire suspendue tragiquement entre deux pôles d'attraction.⁶

Si la parole de Bataille est "suspendue," le mouvement de contamination qu'elle entraîne dans son sillon semble être irréversible. Alors que Bataille avait déclaré avoir une approche heuristique évolutionniste, les contaminations de l'évolution à l'intérieur de la recherche s'étendent à l'outil même de cette recherche: au début du texte, Bataille utilise l'exemple des grottes de Lascaux pour démontrer historiquement la cohabitation de la connaissance de la mort, de l'érotisme, et du travail. Mais plus tard, lorsqu'il cherche à faire de l'avènement de l'art et du jeu, le point culminant de notre évolution, Lascaux n'est plus cet endroit sombre et lugubre "qui trahit en même temps le respect et la peur" (Bataille 585): Lascaux est désormais consacrée au jeu, à l'art et à la "*passion*" d'obéir à la séduction, c'est-à-dire, à l'érotisme (595). Il y a donc une contamination de Lascaux, une interprétation (poétique) d'un objet que Bataille déclare utiliser comme preuve (scientifique).

L'écriture de Bataille semble donc évoluer non pas le long d'une ligne droite, mais plutôt au travers d'une trame à l'intérieur de laquelle les éléments se contaminent. Le cadre général du texte nous annonce un discours linéaire, historique, structuré. Nous avons vu comment à l'intérieur de ce cadre fini projetant une vision structurée de notre origine, nous passons sans cesse à des niveaux différents de causalité, comment dans un discours qui annonce l'évolution comme seul outil heuristique possible, nous sommes entraînés, invités à naviguer dans un champ d'influences. Cette navigation en quelque sorte détruit de l'intérieur le cadre à l'intérieur duquel elle s'inscrit. Une telle écriture ne serait donc pas régie par une accumulation, mais par une forme de répétition amplifiée, de contamination heuristique et poétique. L'érotisme, d'autre part, est pure dépense, pure perte. Si l'amplification est perte, elle n'est jamais perte pure: si Bataille

remet en question les explications qu'il a avancées auparavant, cette remise en question qualifie, mais ne détruit pas, les assertions antérieures. Or il ne suffit pas de rompre le discours rationnel pour accéder au discours érotique. S'il est vrai que le discours érotique ne peut naître qu'à l'intérieur d'une parole raisonnable, il faut qu'il soit néanmoins perte, dépense. Nous allons analyser les passages des *Larmes d'Eros* où cette rupture dans le rien, dans la dépense fait exploser le cadre du discours rationnel.

Lorsqu'il élabore sa définition du sacré que l'interdit qui le frappe fait naître, Bataille semble lui-même pris de cet envoûtement caractéristique de la transgression. Au moment où il nous déclare que la *transgression* de l'interdit envoûte, le discours semble devenir cette fascination. Ensorcelée, subjuguée, la parole se tait: "C'est la transgression de l'interdit qui envoûte. . ." (607, je souligne). Soudain, le discours est lui-même suspendu (trois points de suspension. . .) dans sa transgression du discours linéaire de raison. Après la perte pure, la disparition, la parole reprend son cours, parole à l'intérieur de laquelle la perte peut à nouveau s'inscrire. Cette parole nous décrit alors "le sens d'une étrange victoire" (607) que nous donne la mort, quand soudain, c'est la parole elle-même qui meurt, et nous donne cette étrange sensation de disparition:

Mais, en moi, la mort définitive a le sens d'une étrange victoire. Elle me baigne de sa lueur, elle ouvre en moi le rire infiniment joyeux: celui de la disparition!. (607)

C'est encore une fois le discours linéaire de raison (celui qui prétend expliquer), qui disparaît: le discours de la raison est devenu celui de la mort.

Un silence similaire se fait un peu plus loin, dans la discussion du "moment décisif de la vie humaine" lorsque, "rejetant l'érotisme de la religion, les hommes ont réduit celle-ci à la morale utilitaire" (611). À ce moment de notre évolution, "l'érotisme, perdant son caractère sacré, devint immonde . . ." (611). L'érotisme, devenu im-monde, disparaît du discours, devient suspendu, mais naît de (et finalement n'est que) cette disparition. Le discours de Bataille n'est pas "de morale utilitaire," mais plutôt inutilité érotique, non pas dans la mesure où l'érotisme sortirait du monde du discours, mais plutôt dans la mesure où il est inclus, compris dans la parole de raison.

Comme le "sens" de l'énigme de Lascaux, la pensée de Bataille "se révèle et néanmoins se voile. De l'instant même où [elle] se révèle, [elle] se voile . . ." (597): dès que le discours de raison apparaît, le silence le voile dans son érotisme. Un autre coin du voile est alors soulevé, et ce coin de raison subrepticement dé-voilé est alors rapidement recouvert d'un autre voile.

Comment rendre compte des fuites du texte à l'intérieur d'une analyse d'accumulation? Puisque l'on ne peut "penser l'économique et le non-économique, le même et le tout-autre,"⁷ il semble qu'il soit impossible d'exprimer sans entasser, économiser, ce qui se veut être perte pure, dépense. Comment de plus résister à la tentation d'expurger le texte de Bataille de tout ce qui le dé-range. Nous pourrions dé-couvrir "le poétique ou l'extatique [. . .] qui *dans tout discours* peut s'ouvrir à la perte absolue de son sens" (Economie 383), ou bien recourir à l'analogie, la méta-phore qui tiendrait de la parole poétique mais qui trans-porterait la parole de raison vers sa fragmentation.

Par exemple, pour Foucault, c'est au coeur de la "fracture du sujet philosophique" ou de la "disparition du sujet philosopant que le langage philosophique s'avance comme en un *labyrinthe*, non pour le retrouver, mais pour en éprouver (et par le langage même) la perte jusqu'à la limite."⁸ A un discours totalisant sur la "pensée" de Bataille, Foucault substitue donc ici une reconnaissance de la "fracture," de la "disparition" du sujet que le langage ne retrouve pas, mais qu'il éprouve et re-crée. C'est donc, à l'intérieur de chaque texte individuel que le langage connaît *et* réalise la fragmentation du "sujet philosopant" présente (hors-contexte) dans la juxtaposition de genres dans l'oeuvre de Bataille.

Dans son "Avant-Propos" Bataille annonce la problématique des *Larmes d'Eros*: "l'absurdité des rapports de l'érotisme et de la morale" (575). C'est cette "absurdité" que Bataille va nous expliquer en nous en donnant l'origine "dans les rapports de l'érotisme et des superstitions les plus lointaines de la religion" (575). J'aimerais suggérer ici que l'argument de Bataille semble effectivement évoluer au coeur de la figure labyrinthienne qu'a repérée Foucault: "de deux choses l'une, *ou* ce qui obsède est en premier ce que le désir, ce que la brûlante passion nous suggèrent; *ou* nous avons le raisonnable souci d'un avenir amélioré" (575, je souligne). Le système binaire que Bataille établit ici rappelle les choix qu'un sujet se voit amené à effectuer à l'intérieur du labyrinthe: *ou* il faudrait tourner à droite, *ou* il faudrait tourner à gauche; *ou* le choix est judicieux, *ou* il est erroné. Mais ces choix

ne sont qu'une étape dans la recherche des rapports de l'érotisme et de la morale. Bataille ne se contente pas de faire évoluer son argumentation à l'intérieur d'alternatives. Dans le labyrinthe, les chemins sont déjà tracés, il faut les choisir. Choix entre le bon et le mauvais. Bataille ne s'en tient pas à ce schéma: "il existe, semble-t-il, un moyen terme. Je puis vivre dans le souci d'un avenir meilleur. Mais je puis encore rejeter cet avenir dans un autre monde. Dans un monde dans lequel la mort seule a le pouvoir de m'introduire . . ." (575). Ici il semblerait que Bataille soit sorti du labyrinthe, du système à deux dimensions que la configuration du labyrinthe statique implique, et qu'il remette en question la structure spatiale du labyrinthe. La parole de Bataille, déjà, échappe à la structuration spatiale que Foucault lui applique.

Outre le fait que le discours de Bataille ne se plie pas aux lois d'un système (un choix binaire à l'intérieur d'un système), il ne se limite pas non plus à un seul système, à une seule grille de lecture des "données historiques": "*au-dessus* de la précision historique," nous ne perdons jamais de vue la dualité paradoxale du désir "brûlant" et du souci "raisonnable" d'un avenir meilleur. L'explication que veut nous donner Bataille des rapports de l'érotisme et de la morale prend donc la forme d'un choix entre deux voies herméneutiques, un évolutionnisme scientifique et un principe philosophique supra-historique. La métaphore du labyrinthe ne rend pas compte de la pensée de Bataille dans sa complexité dynamique et spatiale: Bataille, en allant *au-delà* des choix binaires non seulement invente une troisième direction, un "moyen terme," mais crée une deuxième dimension en postulant l'existence d'une explication supra-historique, *au-dessus* du labyrinthe. Ainsi, bien qu'elle ait l'avantage d'offrir une vision dynamique de la création à l'intérieur de chaque oeuvre du sujet philosophique fragmenté, la métaphore du labyrinthe risque d'enfermer le parcours discursif de Bataille dans des choix binaires et dans un espace géométrique plan.

Dans la "Préface à la transgression" Foucault compare encore la parole de Bataille à un "langage de rochers, ce langage incontournable auquel rupture, escarpement, profil déchiré sont essentiels, est un langage circulaire qui renvoie à lui-même et se replie sur une mise en question de ses limites" (762). Nous voyons donc que le langage de Bataille est "incontournable," comme le choix qu'il faut faire dans le labyrinthe: on peut contourner un angle, mais finalement, il faut toujours choisir. D'autre part, la métaphore spatiale s'enrichit ici d'une notion qui ne s'intègre pas à la forme rigide et statique du

labyrinthe: le déchirement. Si le langage est incontournable, il est aussi ce "moyen terme" par lequel il peut s'échapper: il est la "rupture" et l'"escarpement" qui permettent un passage vers le haut. Apparemment, Foucault ne se satisfait pas de la métaphore du labyrinthe, et il éprouve le besoin de juxtaposer deux systèmes métaphoriques discontinus (qui ne forment pas un système cosmogonique cohérent). Ce faisant, il parvient à rendre donc compte de ce qui échappait au labyrinthe: le moyen terme et le passage vers et par le haut. Il manque cependant une dimension à la lecture de Foucault car la juxtaposition un peu arbitraire des deux systèmes métaphoriques rend le texte de Bataille statique et plat. Que devient la dynamique du texte de Bataille?

Lorsque Foucault décrit le mouvement de la parole de Bataille, il suggère que celui-ci est "circulaire" (762). Mais comment concilier l'"escarpement, le profil déchiré" que le langage franchit avec une certaine circularité qu'il est sensé parcourir? Comment combine-t-il la circularité du langage de Bataille avec ses "décrochages dans le temps" et son "décrochage dans la distance de la parole à celui qui parle?" (761) Seule une métaphore spatiale qui pourrait rendre compte à la fois de l'espace dynamique à trois dimensions et d'une géométrie plane résoudrait la contradiction dans laquelle la parole de Foucault s'est enfermée?

Dans son article intitulé "La métaphore de l'oeil," Barthes analyse le "parcours métaphorique" de l'oeil dans *L'Histoire de l'oeil*. Barthes reprend les théories de Jakobson et lit le texte de Bataille en termes de métaphores et de métonymies, d'axes paradigmatique et syntagmatique. Pour lui, *L'Histoire de l'oeil* est basée sur deux chaînes métaphoriques (chaque chaîne est une "chaîne de signifiants [. . .] en échelle'"⁹): celle de l'oeil et celle des larmes qui se redistribuent sur l'axe syntagmatique et entre lesquelles il y a substitution, "échange" (774). Barthes installe donc un espace de lecture mathématique, une configuration spatiale en deux dimensions qui rend compte de la verticalité et de l'horizontalité. Sa lecture est un mouvement qui, en combinant le vertical et l'horizontal fait naître une dynamique reliant une succession de points définis par leur position par rapport aux axes des X et des Y.

La formulation du langage en termes de fonction rend compte de l'effet dynamique des passages à des niveaux différents de parole dont parlait Foucault, mais elle enferme aussi le langage dans une configuration spatiale limitée horizontalement et verticalement. L'axe des X n'a qu'un nombre limité d'éléments du syntagme. L'axe des Y ne

comprend d'autre part qu'un nombre fini de séries métaphoriques (l'oeil et les larmes). Il en résulte que le langage considéré en fonction du syntagme et du paradigme en est réduit à un domaine fini. Après chaque nouvelle combinaison (x,y), il faudrait en effet retourner à l'origine. La dynamique du langage sera donc la suivante: de gauche à droite, de haut en bas et finalement de droite à gauche (ou vice-versa). Un tel langage aurait une configuration spatiale comparable à une spirale que l'on aurait aplatie, écrasée. Et comme le nombre d'éléments du paradigme est nécessairement limité, de même les trajets possibles sont un nombre limité, si bien que la dynamique de ce langage ne pourrait que se répéter indéfiniment. La spirale écrasée finit par devenir une sphère dont aucun trajet ne s'échappe. La langue, et à partir de là, le récit, seraient emprisonnés, "enserrés," dans ce que Barthes appelle la "sphère métaphorique" (774).

Une répartition spatiale en deux dimensions à la Jakobson rend donc compte de la verticalité et de l'horizontalité du discours de Bataille, ainsi que de sa dynamique. Cependant, elle limite aussi le mouvement du discours à un espace clos, tandis que la métaphore du labyrinthe chez Foucault la limitait à une géométrie plane. Quoi qu'il en soit, il semblerait que l'adaptation de ces figures métaphoriques spatiales aux *Larmes d'Éros* n'aboutit qu'à une vision totalisante qui aplatirait le discours de Bataille et sa dynamique ou les enfermerait dans un espace d'où rien ne s'échappe.

C'est cette vision totalisante que Jean-François Fourny remet en cause au début de son article sur "Les avatars de l'interdit dans l'oeuvre de Bataille":

on peut même avancer qu'une interprétation *monolithique et standardisée* de l'interdit s'est répandue, concédant implicitement à ce dernier une *stabilité* théorique qui fait cependant défaut. Mais cette interprétation, bien que largement accréditée, ne résiste pas à l'examen.¹⁰

Les métaphores spatiales que nous avons analysées relèvent de cette stabilisation de la parole de Bataille, stabilisation qui reste néanmoins théorique, car, à peine enfermé, le discours de Bataille échappe à la configuration spatiale que nous avons voulu lui imposer.

Pour détruire ou du moins secouer une interprétation monolithique de l'interdit chez Bataille, il semblerait que Fourny soit à la recherche d'une grille de lecture, d'un modèle théorique qui rendrait compte de la forme et de la dynamique de la parole de Bataille. Fourny analyse l'interdit à travers les textes de Bataille, de *La Struc-*

ture psychologique du fascisme aux *Larmes d'Eros*, essayant d'en "retracer la genèse en distinguant trois étapes" (272). Il s'ensuit donc que Fourny considère l'oeuvre de Bataille dans une vision chronologique et évolutionniste. Bien que son but soit d'ébranler la vision monolithique proposée par le discours critique, Fourny considère une évolution du thème de l'interdit dans l'oeuvre de Bataille. Or, postuler l'existence d'une évolution à l'intérieur d'un discours, c'est déjà le considérer comme *sensé*, pourvu d'un sens, d'une direction. Pour ébranler une interprétation monolithique, Fourny en est donc réduit à transformer les textes de Bataille en un autre discours monolithique.

Selon Fourny, le texte de Bataille témoigne d'une "tension permanente," de "contradictions," c'est un "obstacle" à "surmonter" (272). Pour Fourny la dialectique de l'interdit chez Bataille évolue vers une synthèse par "basculement" (272, 280). Il semblerait que la pensée de Bataille "oscille sans cesse" (281). La métaphore du balancier rend compte de la dynamique du discours de Bataille. Mais tout en choisissant une métaphore qui envisage la pensée de Bataille comme une oscillation (ce qui rend compte d'un mouvement qui revient sur lui-même puis repart), Fourny, dans ses descriptions non-métaphoriques du discours, décrit un mouvement linéaire qui ne va que dans un sens: il n'y a de plus que mouvement vers l'avant, des premières oeuvres de Bataille aux dernières. Dans les *Larmes d'Eros*, l'interdit "bascule du côté du péché originel, son *dernier avatar*" (280, je souligne) et finalement, la légitimisation de la théorie par l'ethnologie (la troisième étape) est suivie d'un "basculement *définitif* du côté de la Bible" (272, je souligne).

Pour Fourny, la pensée de Bataille prend donc la forme de glissements successifs, de points "en porte-à-faux" (272, 280) qui basculent jusqu'à une situation stable, finale qui retient le balancier dans une position figée: "la dernière métamorphose nous sera présentée dans *Les Larmes d'Eros* où, tout en maintenant les *acquis* de la pré-histoire et de l'ethnologie [. . .], l'interdit vient finalement se *superposer* au mythe biblique du fruit défendu" (281, je souligne). Finalement, le "basculement définitif de l'interdit du côté de la Bible" clôture l'évolution de l'interdit dans l'oeuvre de Bataille (272). D'où la contradiction de Fourny qui déclare par ailleurs que "contrairement à ce qui est généralement affirmé, l'interdit est une notion profondément *instable* dont l'assise théorique se révèle *fuyante*" (280). Or, c'est précisément cette "assise fuyante" et "l'instabilité" de

la notion que la métaphore du balancier telle que Fourny l'utilise, entraîne, dans son sillage, mais finit par paralyser. Outre le fait qu'il ne parcourrait qu'une direction, le discours de Bataille s'immobiliserait finalement dans une position de non-retour qui serait la *somme* de ses métamorphoses et qui viendrait englober les résultats d'autres accumulations. Appliquer la métaphore du balancier à la pensée de Bataille revient bizarrement à l'enfermer, à l'immobiliser en un point où règne non plus l'érotisme mais son contraire, le travail, en un point d'où la perte, la dépense auraient déjà disparu définitivement. Le balancier figé, privé de mouvement, de direction, de sens, ne rend bien sûr pas compte de la dynamique du non-sens de la parole de Bataille. Si le balancier de Fourny exprime le "non-sens," c'est seulement dans la mesure où il fige la direction. Le balancier de Fourny est une absence de sens (direction) où les sens (signification) s'accumulent, alors qu'il semblait au contraire vouloir trouver une métaphore qui exprimerait le non-sens (non-signification) dans ce qu'il a de plus dynamique et de plus prodigue.

Proposons donc pour conclure que, pour parler de la parole de Bataille, il nous faut trouver une grille de lecture, un modèle métaphorique qui rendrait compte à la fois de la dynamique discursive (évolutions linéaires, spatiales) ainsi que de la perte subite de "sens," de la phagocytose du discours "théorique" par l'irruption de la perte pure, du mot poétique, de l'extase, de l'érotisme. Les *Larmes d'Eros* semblent, plus que tout autre texte de Bataille, épris des "avatars" de son propre discours: si un seul modèle de lecture pouvait nous emmener dans le périple de son interdit, dans le labyrinthe, les sables mouvants de son érotisme, il devrait rendre compte de toutes les formes de transgression qui caractérisent le texte. Il me semble que c'est précisément au moment où Foucault cherche à définir la transgression (et non pas le texte dans son ensemble) qu'il conceptualise ce modèle impossible qui aurait pu servir de métaphore pour décrire le cheminement de la pensée de Bataille:

La transgression n'est donc pas à la limite comme le noir est au blanc, le défendu au permis, l'extérieur à l'intérieur, l'exclu à l'espace protégé de la demeure. Elle lui est liée plutôt selon un *rapport en vrille* dont aucune effraction simple ne peut venir à bout.

(Foucault 755, je souligne)

On pourrait donc, pour apercevoir la transgression du texte de Bataille, le lire comme une "vrille" qui nous entraînerait dans le

dédale de sa raison et de son érotisme, dont certains points repasseraient, en occupant un autre espace, une autre dimension. Le regard, subjugué par la succession étrange de points bizarrement proches et soudain lointains serait entraîné par le mouvement de la vrille, de la spirale jusqu'à l'explosion de vide, de non-sens. Le regard, rivé sur le mouvement et arrivé à la fin de la spirale, ferait l'expérience du non-sens.

Mais la vrille, qui semble être la métaphore idéale à opposer (ajouter?) à toutes celles que nous avons étudiées jusqu'ici, n'échappe pas à leurs défauts: elle est, elle aussi, une totalisation. Je suggérerais donc que c'est la *recherche* de métaphores de lecture qui constitue en elle-même une interprétation mimétique d'un texte de la transgression et que le fait que nous en soyons encore à chercher le modèle idéal, est un *effet* de lecture, un exemple du type d'interprétation que le discours de Bataille *produit*. Le texte de Bataille qui résulte du mélange de l'érotisme et du travail visiblement incite à la production de modèles métaphoriques qui rendent compte des frictions que la logique ne résout pas. Finalement, on pourrait "résumer" la critique de Bataille à une accumulation de lectures qui, elles-mêmes, forment un supra-texte de travail, d'accumulation, mais qui, par ailleurs, a un côté ludique, créatif, érotique.

Le texte que nous avons proposé ici passe de métaphores en métaphores un peu comme le texte de Bataille qui chemine, à la manière d'une vrille, le long d'un parcours infini et indescriptible. Notre lecture, constituée de la critique des métaphores totalisantes, ajoute, enlève, mais procède par accumulation: elle est donc elle aussi tentée par la constitution de la métaphore idéale qui rendrait compte du texte de Bataille. En fait, la "vérité" de la lecture des *Larmes d'Eros* n'est pas dans la découverte du modèle qui "marche" mais dans la prise de conscience que le texte de Bataille incite à la création de métaphores tout en refusant systématiquement de s'y laisser englober.

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Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, "De l'Économie restreinte à l'économie générale: un hégélianisme sans réserve" in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967) 385.

2. Bernard Sichère, "L'Écriture souveraine de Georges Bataille" in *Tel Quel* (93) 65.
3. Julia Kristeva, "Bataille, l'Expérience et la pratique" in *Actes du Colloque de Cerisy* (1972). (10/18, 1973) 275.
4. C'est du moins la terminologie qu'a adoptée, par exemple, Kristeva pour qui "les écrits théoriques comme *L'Expérience intérieure*, *l'Erotisme* [. . .] enchaînent et dissolvent les thèmes des systèmes idéologiques, religieux ou scientifiques" (Kristeva 281).
5. Georges Bataille, *Les Larmes d'Eros*. Oeuvres Complètes IX (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) 610-11.
6. Maurice Blanchot, "Le Jeu de la pensée" in *Critique* (195-96) 738.
7. Jacques Derrida, "La différance" in *Tel Quel: Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) 60.
8. Michel Foucault, "Préface à la transgression" in *Critique* (195-96) 761-62.
9. Roland Barthes, "La Métaphore de l'oeil" in *Critique* (195-96) 772.
10. Jean-François Fourny, "Les Avatars de l'interdit dans l'oeuvre de Bataille" in *Stanford French Review* VI (Fall-Winter 1982) 271, je souligne.

Grammatologie or Gramma Au Logis: Gramma's Drama

James Arlandson

No one exceeds Derrida in using puns, plays and double entendre. He shows how language, even philosophical language, slips and slides and demonstrates thus that absolute, transcendental signifieds allegedly do not stay fixed to their signifiers. Since the definition of the French word *pastiche* combines imitation and parody, this article is a *pastiche* of Derrida's ideas on deconstruction and of his humorous style. I have attempted to imitate Derrida's play with language and turn it around on him. This play creates a parody, though the parody has purpose. I hope to go beyond mere puns and play, and humorously approximate, fully aware of the procedural gaps and shortcomings, some key concepts.

This article, whose main objective, hidden within linguistic playfulness, is to deconstruct the word *gramma* in grammatology, is divided into three sections. First, the Freudian-Lacanian view of language vis-à-vis the Oedipal desire is quickly summarized and "applied" to Derrida. Second, the title for Derrida's new science, grammatology, is shown to be, because of the fluidity of language, deconstructible mainly through homophony and etymology but also through other such Derridean-Freudian-Lacanian ideas. It is deconstructible not only because Derrida attaches the word *logos* to it but also because he apparently misreads the Greek word *gramma* which he *has* to use instead of the words *grammè* and *gram* when he builds a new science: hence the word *grammatology*. The *gramma-grammè-gram* trilogy, which is inextricably linked when built upon, under-

goes displacement and replacement, or, to use a favored Derridean word, supplementarity. *Gramma* supplements *grammè* and *gram*. Although the science of the trace which emanates from *gramma*, formerly *grammè*, is supposedly "irreducible," this Greek word contains so many traces that I hope to show that it reaches what Michael Riffaterre calls "undecidability."¹ This network of traces means that it has an etymology which makes it a sign, which all combined make it have multiple signifiers and signifieds as it comes down the corridor of history. It has to signify, I shall argue, more than the apparent "nothing" which Derrida decides to assign to it. It is not immune from or privileged over the alleged vagaries of language. Third, I intend to culminate the first two sections by illustrating humorously how Derrida, accusing Freud of imitating his grandson's game of *fort/da*, falls into the same game with language.

A warning, though. Hugh Silverman informs us that "to imitate Derrida's style—employing the puns, play, double entendre, etc.—does not as such make for a deconstructive practice."² I partially agree with him, though playing with language is still a good place to start. I have attempted through all the play to approximate the "deconstructive practice."

We all know that Oedipus unwittingly killed his father and then married his mother. Sigmund Freud adopted the fatherless, wandering character Oedipus to use as a prototype or archetype of what males innately desire to do to the father to have the mother: to kill him and claim intimacy with the mother. Of course the father can be more than just a natural father. He can be the universal incest taboo, societal law, and a host of other noes.

Many literary critics, taking their cues from Freud and his followers, such as Jacques Lacan, have read the Oedipus complex in various works of literature. The premises are these: unbeknownst to the author's consciousness he or she can be governed by the discourse of the unconscious which Lacan says is structured like a language.³ The unconscious contains many things such as repressions, foreclosures, denials, and the Oedipal desire. At times the unconscious manifests the discourse of the Other in textual phenomena such as slips of the tongue, omissions, gaps, automatisms of repetition, etc.

It seems that every human being has an unconscious. According to Derrida's reading of Freud every human supposedly has the semantic core of the oneiric content of *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles' play.⁴ If we accept these premises then Derrida too has an uncon-

scious and an Oedipal desire, and he is manifesting a repetition compulsion. Which repetition compulsion? "For example, the truth. But is truth an example?" (414). Since I am not offering the truth, only a hypothesis, I present the following as an example.

Derrida, in most of his major works, sets out to deconstruct the theories of the founding Fathers of various movements. Plato is thought to be the Father of philosophy. Derrida attempts to dethrone Plato in his *Dissémination*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is considered one of the Fathers of the Enlightenment, and Derrida, in his work *De la Grammatologie*, challenges Rousseau's idea of writing as a representation of speech. Ferdinand de Saussure is considered the Father of linguistics or of the theory of signs. Again, in *De la Grammatologie*, Derrida tries to dethrone Saussure. Freud is the Father of the psychoanalytical movement. So in some of his briefer essays in *Écriture et différence* and in *La Carte postale* he tries to deconstruct the interpretations of Father Freud. Derrida has also challenged many others: Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Genet, Lévi-Strauss, and Austin, to name only a few. And of course Derrida rejects the idea of a transcendental signifier. He tries to perform the ultimate Oedipal act by attempting to assassinate the heavenly Father. These continuous acts of aggression and even attempted regicides or patricides of the Fathers who, in their smugness, are trapped by logocentrism, clearly manifest a repetition compulsion.

Could Derrida also be trapped under this signifier of automatic repetition, Lacan's discourse of the Other? In the decentering, dethroning and even the murder of these Father figures, does Derrida re-enact the Oedipal act? Can Derrida slip out from under this signifier?

With whom does Derrida want intimacy? For whom does he kill these Fathers? Who is his symbolic mother? Could Roland Barthes' notion of *jouissance* of/with the text be relevant/*relevant* here? Or could it go deeper than just the text? Could Derrida unconsciously wish to be intimate with "*sa grammair*?" Or deeper still, could he wish to be intimate with *sa Gramma*? Was writing *sa Gramma* pleasurable or was Derrida's meaning too disseminated to be gratifying? Is it Derrida's desire to find pleasure in himself since he can only write and send post cards to himself? So is *sa Gramma* just self-gratification? Or can we go deeper still? In having the sign slip, thus making it soft, cuddly, unfixed, not hard, but weak, is Derrida creating the mother he desires? Since his *grammè* is smaller still than

the Saussurean sign then most likely *sa Gramma* is his target. Homophones are like that: they permit replacement, displacement and supplementarity.

Where is *sa Gramma*? Where does she live? Is she in a language prison? Is *Gramma au logis*? If homophones have any value as revealing a possible discourse of the Other then this sort of evidence points to *Gramma au logis*. *Gramma* is confined to the house that Jacques built. Only Derrida and a few select disciples have a key to this prison of non-truth. They have free access to *sa Gramma*. We can only be voyeurs, an unhappy viewpoint indeed. So only Derridean initiates can consciously disseminate meaning. They "know what they are doing."⁵ Could this be what the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton is referring to when he writes:

one advantage of the dogma that we are prisoners of our own discourse, unable to advance reasonably certain truth-claims because such claims are merely relative to our language, is that it allows you to drive a coach and horses through everybody else's beliefs while not saddling you with the inconvenience of having to adopt one yourself?⁶

What is the *logi(s)e* that Jacques built? What is it made of? Could the answer be found in its history or etymology? Derrida appreciates etymology: the traces of a word spread out into a vast textual network.⁷ Is it possible to get trapped in this network of words. We should feel there/their presence/absence. *Logi(s)e* has its origins in the dreaded logos which Derrida seeks desperately to deconstruct.⁸

Gramma has been given the suffix logos which is the very concept that Derrida wishes to deconstruct. Derrida wants both to tear down (though of course not to "destruct" totally) and build up *Gramma's logi(s)e*.⁹ He wants to play a game which requires its existence yet brings in the deconstructionists. It is as if he has two teams working on it. One team is on one side of the *logi(s)e* taking every brick down. This first team is called *briseurs*. The other team is on the other side of the *logi(s)e* putting every brick back and is called *bricoleurs*.

Derrida has combined binary opposites, according to his definition of *gram* and logos, and defines *gram* as follows: "the *gram* is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation" (Positions 43). One consolation: at least *Gramma* comes before *logie* or logos. To Derrida's "Positive Science," *grammatologie*, one must add

the dreaded logos with all its traces. If *Gramma au logie* is to resemble a "science"—which Derrida hesitates to call it (35-36)—then logos has to be added to it. Its meaning now can be disseminated into many irrecoverable directions. Compound words could be primary targets or victims of *différance*. What happens in this combination? What happens between the elements of the "compound?" The very concept Derrida wants to deconstruct is parasitically attached to his *Gramma*, eating away at her, sucking out her strength and force and very life-blood. *Gramma* is getting weaker by the moment. Someone needs to deconstruct the logos off of *Gramma*, which Derrida brought into his own de-constructed *logi(s)e* and attached to her. Could the answer to what happens in the gap between the "divine logos" (*logie*) (35) and *Gramma* be found in her history or etymology? Or will *Gramma's* roots create more problems as well?

Who is *sa Gramma*? Where does she come from? The answer is indeed seen in her etymology. But in order to contrast better her etymology with Derrida's understanding of *sa Gramma* we should first look at one of his descriptions of her, keeping in mind the one cited above.

Gram as *différance*, then, is a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences. . . . (27)

What happens if we "play" with the traces of differences?

The play of differences supposes, in effect, synthesis and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving, results in each "element"—phoneme or grapheme—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. (26)

What happens if we try to "synthesize and refer" to other traces in the word *gramma*? We have just seen how Derrida defines *gram*. Does it contain the "simple element" that Derrida applies to it, or can we see if it is "constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system"? Does *Gramma* refer only to herself, in the trace that Derrida refers to her, or are there other traces? Will these other traces produce a binary opposition to the trace that Derrida has selected? Liddell and Scott, lexicographers of

Classical Greek, can help us partially trace some of the traces of *sa Gramma*.¹⁰ These two scholars trace *Gramma*'s heritage and shed a "different" light on Derrida's apparently exclusive descriptions of his *Gramma* cited above.

As it turns out, *Gramma* is Greek. *Gramma*, a neuter noun, which we transpose into a feminine, modern, proper noun in deference to today's *Gramma*, means the following according to Liddell and Scott's lexicon:

(I) that which is drawn; in plural the lines of a drawing or picture; in plural, figures in a picture; (II) that which is written, a written character, letter; in the plural letters, hence the alphabet; b. articulate sound, letter; c. puns; d. inscription; 2. in pl. notes in music; 3. mathematical diagram; 4. letter inscribed on lots which judges or jurymen drew; b. quarters of a town; 5. small weight; (III) in the plural also a piece of writing, an inscription, epitaph; 2. papers or documents of any kind, for proof; records, accounts; in singular, a bill or account; 3. a man's writings, i.e. a book, treatise; in pl. books; in sg. the Law of Moses; opp. *pneuma*; sg. article in a treaty; 4. laws or rules; (IV) letters or learning.

Sa Gramma retains all these traces. She has inherited quite a number of them. She always has in her possession, passed down through the centuries, musical scores, a bill (*la facture de la non-vérité*), pictures, records, a man's book (whose?), epitaphs, inscriptions, drawings (whose?) hung on her refrigerator, documents, accounts, puns, etc. She is even quite learned when taken in her plural totality.

Derrida describes *différance* in several ways, at least one of which may apply to *sa Gramma*'s ancestry (Positions 8-10). *Différance* ". . . is also the production, if it can still be put this way, of these differences" (9). Has *sa Gramma* produced differences? Again Derrida defines *différance*: it "is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences" (27). The traces of *sa Gramma* are now so disseminated that it is hard, if not impossible, to pin her down for study. Her meaning is now so diffused that no one can say what she is or who she is in her totality with any degree of certainty. She plays with presence and absence as if they were a pair of indivisible and inseparable opposites on a magnet.

Most importantly, and the following becomes the focal point, she has laws and rules as opposed to *pneuma*. The New Testament, wherein is found a depiction of the divine Logos, considers *gramma* the Law as opposed to the divine *Pneuma*. *Gramma* is deadly, *Pneuma* is life-giving. If *Gramma* has neither a sign nor a signifier-

signified, nor a thing, nor an absence or presence, neither a negation nor a position, then she has at least laws and rules, especially when combined with logos. Does the combination of these two traces of *gram*, "nothing?" (Derrida) and "laws and rules" (Liddell and Scott) constitute a binary opposition that is susceptible to deconstruction?¹¹ She may not have a concept, but she has laws and rules in her ancestry. Therefore, is it possible for any book to be written on *Gramma* with any firm authority, or even soft authority? Can one say what she is without employing the *sous rature*? She is a dif-fused and con-fused personage. But the principal trace which is the most intriguing and *attirante* is *gram* as Law since the New Testament refers to *gramma* as the Law. Spivak correctly states that logos is Law (Introduction 50), and Liddell and Scott are right to define *gramma* as the Law. So, by clever metonymic and metaphoric, synonymic and paleonymic, homonymic and homophonic, eponymic and pseudonymic, antonymic and nymphonymic replacement, displacement, condensing and supplementarity, *grammatology* is actually nothing more than Law-Law. It is the law of the Law, whose very existence the Oedipal desire seeks to kill. Instead of *grammatology* releasing us from Law it bogs us down in it.

This question also arises: can we substitute Law for *gram*? Is *sa Gram-ma* a "Law-Ma"? Is she more potent than Tibetan and Mongolian lamas? Is the ultimate Law-Ma marked by shamanistic and tantric rituals? No wonder Bernard-Henri Lévy says that Derrida is not a guru: *Gramma-Law-Ma* is the guru of the family.¹² *Gramma*, the Law-Ma, has a religious aura about her. She intimidates people. She intimidates the logos, and rational thought, with her lama-isms.

Derrida, a faithful grandson/*petit fils* (thus he is in a translinguistic, binding, binary opposition from which he cannot escape), does in fact follow *sa Gramma* faithfully and transcendentalizes his ideas when he makes statements or even implies, for example, that *différance* is neither a word nor a concept,¹³ that a trace is a nothing and exceeds the question "what is" (Grammatology 75), that *gram* "is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence or an absence . . ." (Positions 43), and that deconstruction is not a method nor an interpretation (Norris 18). If these are not signifiers nor things nor concepts then what are they? Are they events? Are they processes? And if they are events or processes then how, precisely, can they not be concepts, presences, absences, or methods? If they are not all these in the "strict sense" then what does strict sense mean? Is it everyday usage? Is it philosophical usage?

How is it that they are apparently privileged over other more mundane words that are non-Derridean? These questions are rhetorical. When one's *Gramma* is a Law-Ma then one's own creations are automatically and necessarily above the rest. They hold a transcendental position. They become transcendental signifiers-signifieds. Like the creator's *Gramma* these words have a religious, unapproachable aura about them. *Ma Gramma* is better than yours.

Thus, *Gramma au logi(s)e* is the laws and rules of the divine logos.¹⁴ She is the study (*logie*) of rules and laws. She is the laws and rules of the divine Law. She is the Law of what Derrida says *gram* is. She is the study of divine Law-Ma. By attaching logos to *sa Gramma* does he advance a step, or dance without any forward progress just like he accuses Freud of doing (Post Card 297, 302, 336, *passim*)? Derrida spins pirouettes in a sort of divine, ritualistic, mystical, lama-istic, language dance. Even though *Gramma's* meaning is difficult to determine and even though her signified is diffused into irrecoverable multiplicity, some still ask what does *Gramma au logis* do exactly? What does a logos-Law-Ma do all day? These questions can be answered in three parts.

First, Derrida assigns to her a dutiful, almost urgent, mission. "Grammatology must . . ." (Positions 35). He uses "must" no less than three times, though we only look at one "must" here. "Grammatology *must* deconstruct everything that ties the concept and norms of scientificity to onto-theology, logocentrism and phonologism" (35, emphasis mine). But how can Gramma deconstruct the very word that permits her to exist as a "science" or study? Logos is indivisibly bound to her. Does or should *grammatologie* exist *sous rature*?

Secondly, Gramma is destined to rescue writing from its inferior position. Writing has been subordinated to speech (faith-in-pre-sence) for too long. According to Derrida's reading of Plato, Plato condemns writing to "wandering and blindness, to mourning" (Grammatology 39).

[Intrusive Digression: the descriptive words which Derrida lifts (*re-lève*?) from all the other possible words in Plato could be significant. "Wandering, blindness, mourning?" Did Oedipus himself act out these words? Why did Derrida choose such words? What did he find in them that he had to quote them from that logocentered man, Plato? *Le discours de l'Autre*?]

Gramma's task is enormous. She will save writing from an apocalyptic, transcendental signifier.

Thirdly, when asking if *Gramma au logis* performs scientific acts, Derrida calls it a science in *Of Grammatology* (74), but hesitates in *Positions* (35-36), where he answers what she does in general. (Is his hesitation-statement *différance*?)

In a word, I would say that it [elle] *inscribes* and *delimits* science; it [elle] must freely and rigorously make the norms of science function in its own writing; once again, it [elle] *marks* and at the same time *loosens* the limit which closes classical scientificity.

(Positions 36, emphasis his)

Spivak clarifies and informs us that *Gramma au logis* is "the science of the *sous rature*" (50). Even if we omit the word "science" in Spivak's definition since Derrida hesitated to call it that, Spivak still has a valid point. This *sous rature* is precisely what *sa Gramma* does, according to Derrida's description. *Sous rature* is easy to understand but nearly impossible to define in French, and hence, difficult to translate.

At first glance it can be translated as "under erasure." *Sous rature* allows us to undo language even though we preserve it (20). "It deletes and leaves legible at the same time" (32). We use words, and their use is permissible provided that we suspend them and do not try to stabilize the signified under the signifier. We can use words only if we let them slide. But, at second glance, how is one to determine the meaning of these two apparently simple French words? The French dictionary *Petit Robert* says that it not only means *sous* as *sous* is usually understood, but that it has some other "grands rapports de sens."

Figuratively it can mean "derrière" as used in this example provided by the dictionary, "elle dissimulait tant de bonté sous des dehors austères." When *Gramma* employs the abstract concept of the physical *rature* is she being figurative? How can one retain meaning, free it at the same time and still use *rature*? How can abstract meaning be put under physical *rature*? Is it possible, with the retention of all the traces and *différences*, to push *sous rature* to figurative limits, and consequently to see the subject as *derrière* and *sous la rature*? We present it thus with the X's representing the *rature*:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Gramma au logis ?

Sous can also be used with the idea of *devant* as in this example given by the dictionary: “sous les fenêtres de qqn.” Therefore we see a curious blend of below and before, of *sens dessous et devant*, which removes the subject out from underneath, from direct contact with, but still in proximity to, the elevated window. It is then also possible to represent *sous rature* in this way:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Gramma au logis

Sa Gramma is left standing outside and under the *logis* and is too short to look in. We know who the *qqn.* is in *Petit Robert*’s example.

The *Petit Robert* dictionary does say that one can be near and below “sans contact avec l’autre” as in the phrase provided, “Rien de nouveau sous le soleil.” So it is possible, retaining all the traces and *différences*, to represent *sous rature* thus:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Gramma au logis

(What would happen if we now placed the Saussurean bar between *les ratures* and *Gramma*?) *Sa Gramma* is exposed in the light of the sun. There is nothing new about her: she is wearing an old hat.

So we find that *sous* can mean under-behind, under-before, and under-without-contact. Is all of this under-stood? The concept of *sous rature* has apparently experienced *différance* and undecidibility in its play with the presence and absence of the signifier-signified. Does *sous rature* have only one signified-presence, the one that *Gramma* gives it? Can it be the same/different or is it protected and shielded from *différance*? *Le sous, qui habite dans une soue, a dépensé son dernier sou afin d’être soûl avec les sens/l’essence.*

We have already begun to probe the depths of Derrida’s opaque “concept” of the trace. Its movement is “occulted,” another word with “hidden, religious” traces.¹⁵ It is “unmotivated” (46). Instituted, it is “the possibility common to all systems of signification” (46). It has a double use and is the function of the play of language and of the pathbreaking (*frayage*) into the unconscious by externality. The latter concept is based on Freud. Derrida reassures us that outside of linguistics, psychoanalytic research seems to provide the “greatest likelihood” of deconstituting “founding concept-words of ontology” (21). And this deconstituting is done by the original/non-original trace. The traces are associated with the marks or the *grammè* made

in the unconscious. These traces are the smallest marks in the unconscious. They are irreducible. But upon which part of the unconscious do these traces leave their mark? According to Freud repressions are "merged" into the *id*.¹⁶ In this new science of *gramma-trace-logie*, *it/id* is the receptacle of the trace.

But perhaps the greatest *frayage* made in the *id* of every human is the primal scene, the Oedipal desire. And if our hypothesis is correct, that Derrida is manifesting the Oedipal desire, then we need to look more closely at this Oedipal *frayage*. The *id* is "connected" with the primal scene. In fact one might equate the primal scene with the *id*, *le ça* or *das Es*. The Oedipal desire is *frayé* into the *id*. Freud says that the ego has mastered the Oedipal complex and has "placed itself in subjection to the *id*" (36). If this is so, then the Oedipal complex is also subjected to the *id*. Freud goes on to say that the Oedipal complex is the "energetic cathexis of the [ego], springing from the *id*" (39). So the Oedipal complex is so powerful that it can "spring" from the *id*. For something to be able to "spring" implies that it is wound up tight and has a strong ground or foundation from which to "spring." It might even be considered the strongest trace or *grammè* in the psyche.

Yet since we have seen the confusing undecidability of what *gramma* actually means, since *grammè* is the science of the mark or trace and yet it still has connections with the *gramma* or Law mentioned in the New Testament, and since the *id* is the "king" of the traces or *grammè* or mark then perhaps we will not be presumptuous in suggesting another name for *sa Gramma*. After all, Derrida wanted to substitute his grammatology for Saussure's semiology in his so-called "program" (Grammatology 51, emphasis mine).

Gramma and *grammè* are too confusing since they are intertwined. *Grammè* is supposedly the irreducible mark yet must be dropped in deference to *gramma* when a science or study or logos is built. A better Greek word is "iota." The New Testament says that not one *iota* will perish from the Law, thus making the *iota* smaller than the *gramma* or *grammè* or Law, and invincible. The *iota* is a sub-part of the *grammè*. Thus we have found that *grammè* is not irreducible. *Iota* is smaller and truly irreducible. And since the principal trace or *grammè*, now the *iota*, is "merged" into the *id* or *le ça*, which used to be *sa/ça Gramma*, the more complete and all-emcompassing name is the *id-iota*. This word combines the most powerful and smallest and most irreducible and relevant (*relevant?*) trace, the *iota*, with the

receptacle of the *iota*, the *id*. These two can no longer be separated since the *id* is the target of the *iota*. An *iota* must be merged into something before it can be retained as a repression. The new science of the *sous rature* is by all neo-linguistic, post-structuralist, post-modern, Derridean rights to be called *id-iota-tology*, instead of grammatology.

Yet somehow we must get away from the *effrayant* logos in grammatology, now id-iota-to-logy. It has too many bad memories, caused by negative *frayages*. We must not have the *iota* and the *id* running to the logos, we want them running from the logos. It so happens that the *Gramma*'s Greek language has a word that protects its readers and speakers from the horrible logos. It is *apo-logos*. This convenient word combines the preposition "apo" which means "away from" and the logos. Hence one is automatically getting "away from" the logos when one uses this word, even without the genitive. In using apo-logos we also maintain the science of the *sous rature* and *différance* because we both keep and remove the logos with the tiny preposition "apo."¹⁷ We can now create an even better and clearer word for this new science: *id-iota-apo-logy*, or, with elision, famous among literate Greeks, *id-iot-apo-logy*. It used to be the *ça-grammè*, which changes to *ça-gramma* the moment one wants to add suffixes to it, like logos: *ça-gramma-to-logy*. Now the new name is not so inconsistent and confusing: *idiotapology*.

Before leaving the Oedipal desire and examining the game of little Ernst, one more comment about some common traits is required. Several translators and commentators have written about Derrida's opaque syn-tax and meaning.¹⁸ And this opaqueness is not a one time occurrence. He repeats this manifest content or behavior over and over again. What is the latent meaning of this repetitive behavior? Since our analysis of Derrida's manifesting an Oedipal complex is valid, perhaps the answer to this new question can be located in this myth too.

Oedipus was an expert at solving riddles. In fact he stated in no uncertain terms that he had solved the riddle of the sphinx and that he could solve the mystery of why the city was plagued. He challenged just about everyone to outdo him in riddle-solving. Could it be that Derrida is challenging his readers to solve his syn-tactical riddles? Could he unconsciously be manifesting his propensity for riddles by writing in riddles? Is his writing style a *rébus*, in every sense (trace) of that French word? Or is he playing with *un bloc*

magique from which he peels off the top layer as soon as he sees us "peering" over his shoulder, keeping all the traces to this English word? Now that a plague of deconstruction has hit literature, will Derrida help us solve the riddle? Will he stop having relations with *sa Gramma* so that the plague will cease? Will he help us solve the riddle of his writing style which profoundly reenacts, in every sense, deconstructive "principles?"

In Derrida's deconstruction of Freud he reveals part of his reading strategy: "it is in order to place in relation, as I have been doing from the beginning, what Freud says and what Freud does, what *Beyond* . . . treats (its object, hypotheses and laws, its problems) and its writing procedure [*démarche*], its performances and operations" (Post Card 390-91). Derrida analyzes not only the content but also the strategy or performance (behavior?) of Freud as seen in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; not only what Freud says but also what he does; not only his objects, but his performance. It is only natural that someone who wants to employ the "method" behind deconstruction would imitate Derrida's actions. Yet what is Derrida's performance or behavior? If we permit the validity of Freud's discovery as Derrida does what could be lurking in his unconscious waiting to surface like a spring unsprung?

Is Derrida also reenacting the serious *fort/da* game of little Ernst since he uses language to deconstruct language? When he adds logos to *sa Gramma* and then deconstructs logos, is he imitating the little boy at play? Derrida similarly critiques Freud who imitated his own grandson: "Freud does with (without) the object of his text exactly what Ernst does with (without) his spool" (Post Card 320).¹⁹ Indeed he recalls that Freud, Ernst's grandfather, often observed his grandson playing a sort of "Hide-and-Go-Seek/Greek" with a spool (and with a string attached, Derrida noted) reasoning and deducing that the game was a repetition compulsion compensating for his mother's absence (Post Card 314-16, 321). Derrida apparently repeats "fo-o-o-rt!" to the signifiers-signifieds of his resented Father figures and then yanks back the once absent meaning of the sign, "da-a-a!," so as to rediscover meaning in his own use of language. What is *derri(ère) da*, before *l'ère-De-(rri)-da*, anyway?²⁰ The signifier-signified is present for Derrida when he wields it like a long sword against language, but it is absent in his Fathers' use of language (What a *différ(e/a)n*ce Derrida permits himself as compared with his resented Father figures!). Was this the "play" that Barbara Johnson

was alluding to in her celebrated deconstruction of Derrida's deconstruction of Lacan's analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, whose text had undergone un-author-ized abridgement, which probably did not change a trace of the signifier-signified? "Derrida, by filling in what Lacan left blank is repeating the same gesture of blank-filling for which he criticizes Lacan."²¹ Thus in order that his own critique of Lacan be transmitted in all its pregnant meaning, Derrida postpones his postponing of meaning, defers his deferring of meaning, delays his delaying of meaning, detours his detouring of meaning, retards his retarding of meaning so that what he means means something, not nothing. Is this play with absence and presence of meaning, this *sous rature*, what Derrida is doing when on the one hand he posits the precariousness of translating (Post Card 382), but then on the other (sleight of) hand goes right ahead and loosely (admittedly so) translates a passage from Freud at his own "risk and peril" (385)? Could Derrida be "disinseminating" meaning at the same time? Since Derrida plays with language like little Ernst played with his spool, with strings attached, then Freud's conclusion about his grandson and Derrida's conclusions about Freud apply to Derrida as well. Will little Ernst, shot skyward like a fireworks display during the grand finale, one day reach mythic proportions like Oedipus? In that mythical future the main title of this speculative essay would be "The Importance of Being 'Ernst'."

Of course Derrida has an answer. Besides the fact that he knows what he is doing (Spivak 45), Derrida places metaphysical language and difficult concepts *sous rature*. Also, he does not care whether he reenacts deconstruction since he is promoting it. He cannot lose and only proves his point even further. Once again he hides behind the concept of *sous rature*. But as we have already seen *sous rature* raises more problems than it solves. Doing is one thing, talking is another, or, more precisely, not talking but *traçant* (*je trace-parle, tu traces-parles, il/elle/on trace-parle*, etc. Remember: *le tracer* comes before *le parler* which comes before some forms of *l'écrire* which comes before *le logos*. Even though traces are supposed to be irreducible, will someone step forward and decenter the privileged "tracecentrism" which decentered logocentrism? Can iota-centrism rise to the deconstructive occasion? What will become the center/sinner?). The response to Derrida's possible response is the same as the response with which we just responded: he still must play *fort/da* with ab-

sence and presence of meaning. Meaning is no(w)here-now there, whether one calls it *sous rature* or *fort/da*.

Some unexpected positions of *sous rature* were used above: below and before and behind and without contact. Now, however, I place *sous rature sous rature: ~~sous rature~~* in the Derridean sense and I leave *fort/da* open, uncensored and elevated:

fort/da

But when I place *sous rature sous rature*, what is to stop me from placing the *sous rature* which is already *sous rature sous rature* again (Différance 44)? Is the first *sous rature* cancelled by the second *sous rature*: are we back to the first *sous rature*? Or are we reinforcing the original *sous rature* before/after it was activated and applied? What happens if a third *sous rature* were added to the second *sous rature* which is "under" the first *sous rature*? Can we employ *sous rature* ad infinitum, ad absurdum, ad nauseum? Little Ernst's game of *fort/da* must quickly and desperately replace and displace *sous rature* if deconstructionists want to keep their common *presence/absence*. Out of the mouths of babes. . . .

Have Oedipus and little Ernst found themselves, or is their *différance* too great to be established with any degree of linguistic certainty? Is literary agnosticism ruling the day so that we cannot trace it or anything else, anywhere? Have Oedipus and little Ernst been successfully *tracés* and even *frayés* in Derrida's unconscious? Does Oedipus have a leg to stand on? Does he have the "'Legs' de Freud"? And more importantly for little Ernst, has he achieved the same mythic status as Oedipus? Has he been traced into all of our un-pre-sub-super-ego-id-iotic-consciousnesses like Oedipus?

This analysis is, of course, speculation. I am "speculating on Derrida" (Post Card 259-409). I am speculating on Derrida's signifiers of repetition compulsion which in all cases surfaces from the unconscious, symbolizes the "language of the unconscious" and speaks for the Other. Derrida does repeat the Oedipal act with multiple Fathers, riddle-writing and the *fort/da* game with language. He apparently does have a maternal figure too. Clearly Derrida's repetition compulsion of "attack philosophy" is a symptom which has a cause. But of what? Derrida offers a psychoanalysis of Freud showing how Freud might have come up with his hypothesis about his grandson (Post Card 320-37). He briefly looks at the events swirling around

Freud during the season of Freud's visit to his daughter's house. He speculates that maybe the tragic events influenced Freud's conclusions. Perhaps, in so doing, Derrida is being ironical, perhaps not—still his method used on others cries out to be approximately imitated or *pastichée*. Is he resisting the death principle through *sa Gramma*? Alas, I am not a psychoanalyst and do not feel as qualified as either Freud or Derrida to comment on life's circumstances as they affect a man's soul. I therefore elect to leave the analysis and therapy to the psychoanalysts. I am quite sure that Derrida would willingly and gladly put his soul or psyche in their hands, if only he knew how to materialize the soul so that his hands could grab it and transfer it to the hands of the psychoanalysts, in other words, if only the sign which represents the metaphor could just sit still long enough, quit squirming like a *petit fils* waiting in the psychoanalyst's waiting room so that it could be grabbed—in other words, if only in other words. . . .²²

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Notes

1. Michael Riffaterre, in "Syllepsis" *Critical Inquiry* 6 (1980) 625–38, warns us that ambiguity "is not the polysemy most words display as dictionary entries but results from the context's blocking of the reader's choice among competing meanings. Undecidability results when the 'syntax will not let him choose' " (628). This is precisely what I am trying to do even though I list all the various meanings of *gramma* from a Greek lexicon. How are words blocked if one does not play with the various meanings and antonyms and synonyms of those words found in the dictionary? Meaning can also be blocked by traces which help govern syntax and context since traces are smaller than both of these. Riffaterre illustrates his own point with Derrida's uses of the word *source*, which, Riffaterre says, is a "perfectly unequivocal word which he [Derrida] transforms into an undecidable word" (630). Derrida does this transformation, according to Riffaterre, by substituting/adding, supplementing or shifting to the words *point d'eau*, or "no water" or "point of water" (630) making of it at once a synonym and an antonym, as well as a dictionary entry. I propose to do a similar transformation by contrasting Derrida's definition of *gramma* with the definitions found in the lexicon, isolating one entry among many of *gramma*, "laws and rules" and seeing how it matches with Derrida's concept of *gramma*.

2. Hugh J. Silverman, "Writing (On Deconstruction) at the Edge of Metaphysics" *Research in Phenomenology* 13 (1978) 97–111.

3. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971) 112, 158–59, 232–33.

4. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 414.

5. Gayatri C. Spivak, Introduction in *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 45.
6. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 144.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Positions* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 40, note 5; 42 note 10. Spivak adds in "Revolutions that as Yet Have No Model: Derrida's *Limited Inc.*" *Diacritics* 10 (1980) 31, that "right from the start Derrida's project has been *paleonymic*, urging a rereading of old words such as 'writing.' " Traces are discussed later.
8. Spivak makes this connection: logos being added to *gramma* (Introduction 50), but she does not mention the deconstructibility of *gramma*, which does subsume *grammè*.
9. Spivak points out that "in the first published version of *De la Grammatologie*, Derrida uses the word 'destruction' in place of 'deconstruction' " (49). If deconstruction is not a method or an interpretation or a concept (Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) 18) then how can one begin to conceive of changing the word? One must have an idea of what the word means conceptually, be dissatisfied with it, and then change it.
10. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek to English Lexicon* 9th ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).
11. I use "nothing" advisedly since Rodolphe Gasché in "Deconstruction as Criticism" *Glyph* 6 (1979) 180, warns us that Derrida's philosophy is not nihilistic. If it is not nihilistic then it appears to "brush by" nihilism as one brushes by death.
12. Bernard-Henri Lévy, "Derrida n'est pas un gourou" *Magazine Littéraire* 88 (1974) 60.
13. Jacques Derrida, "La Différance" *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) 46.
14. Spivak sees logos as "law" at one extreme and *phonè* at the other, and *grammè* as the *sous rature* (50). However, I take *gramma* as laws and rules combined with the *gramma* as Derrida defines it. Logos I take to be as Bass reviews it in "The Double Game" *Taking Chances* ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) 74, and as reasoned discourse, laws, and the study of something as seen in -logy, omitting, of course, the New Testament description of the Logos as the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1; 14).
15. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 47.
16. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961) 19:24.
17. *Apo* can also mean "from" in the sense of "source," so we can keep the *sous rature* idea since *apo* combines "away from" and "source from."
18. To name just a few: Norris, 64; Riffaterre, 633; Lévy, 60; Dominique Janicaud, "Presence and Appropriation" *Research in Phenomenology* (1978) 67; Samuel Weber, "It" *Glyph* 4 (1984) 38; Richard Klein, "Prolegomena to Derrida" *Diacritics* 2 (1972) 29; Alan Bass, "The Double Game" in *Taking Chances*, eds. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) 66.
19. "Just as Ernst, in recalling the object (mother, thing, whatever) to himself, immediately comes *himself* to recall *himself* in an immediately supplementary operation, so the speculating grandfather, in describing or recalling this or that, recalls *himself*" (Post Card 320-21). Could Derrida's own analysis of Freud be turned back on himself?

20. See Gregory Ulmers, "The Post-Age" *Diacritics* 11 (1981) 44-45, for some remarks about Derrida's puns on his own name. Also see Spivak's comments on Derrida's play on words with Searle's name, SARL (Société aux responsabilités limitées), Limited Liability in English, Incorporated in American (*Revolutions* 33). I would like to thank Jean-Pierre Barricelli for providing the pun on Derrida's name to which I added my own twist.

21. Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference" *The Purloined Poe* Eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 218.

22. Thanks go to Prof. Ben Stoltzfus and the members of the French 266 seminar for their help and support.

REVIEW

William VanderWolk. *Flaubert Remembers. Memory and the Creative Experience*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

VanderWolk's text characterizes Flaubert's creative development in two early works, *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education sentimentale*, in terms of the general ideas on memory and in terms of the psychological assimilation of fictions projected from the past onto the present in the lives of Flaubertian characters. The pivotal enigma of Flaubert's artistic enterprise—"être présent partout et visible nulle part"—is outlined in reference to the play of memory and Flaubert's gradual development from self-referential, auto-biographically based juvenile works to a pantheistic supra-self capable of embracing, or reading and writing, the world.

VanderWolk examines how memory, based in sentiment, is retained as a source of experience but is subjugated by the creative interference of the writer, who imposes a critical irony stemming from an impersonal, worldly intelligence. He also suggests that Flaubert, in appropriating *bovaryste* tendencies in artistic projects, forged a constructive tool from a potentially ruinous inclination to self-delusion.

Effacement of the narrative persona and its implications for the Subject, have become the process upon which hinges much post-modern Flaubertian criticism: in this work, the question of effacement is cast in a contiguous relation to the elimination of the present. VanderWolk shows that Flaubert's two key protagonists, Emma and Frédéric, interpret and redefine lived experience according to ar-

bitrary realities derived not only from literature but also from their own lives. Hence the special status of memory which by its nature makes artists of us all. If we accept that not only the future but also the past may be invented, we might then want to attempt to determine whether writing the past is a more radical procedure than prescribing the future and whether it is more invasive of the Subject. This issue would tie in with the broader theoretical question of the lost Subject, and it would have particular significance for *L'Education sentimentale*, where a fundamental issue for any analysis is the potential analogical relation between personal Subject and historical *Zeitgeist*. VanderWolk does not pursue this angle however. His interest lies in the reverse implication of the maxim, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi"—i.e., not just that the text is permeated with a unique Flaubertian style, but that Gustave himself had a strong dose of *bovarysme*. It would seem that the *thèse manquée* of this book would have revealed a kindred relation between Madame Bovary and Monsieur Flaubert, an empathy more profound than the cynical deconstruction of the protagonist's self-delusion which seems to constitute the denotative message of the text.

One would expect that attention to memory would offer more potential insight into *L'Education sentimentale* than into *Madame Bovary* given that, in addition to that of the protagonist, the collective memory of the nation is intended by the text. However the ultimate irrelevance of the latter to the former leads VanderWolk to a rather brusque conclusion that the novel is not historically analytic. The pairing of Emma and Frédéric opens up a rich comparative panorama, yet VanderWolk prefers to assimilate the two in a study of a consistent process of memory. Such a process is not then identified in relation either to the suggested Flaubertian affinity for his characters, or in terms of an overall theory of memory.

In fact, this key term is not specifically examined, and the lack of analytic precision in this book is consistent with the shortage of theoretical development. This can be anticipated from the general circularity of the preface as, for example, in the following statement about the particular significance of memory for Flaubert:

The fusion of art and life, of experience and imagination, can be found in memory, for it is through the mind's transformation of real memories that imagination creates fiction. For Flaubert, memory was the key to creation, the richest source of material and inspiration. (xiii)

Thus *Flaubert Remembers* has little theoretical contribution to make and the text never really responds to the title's suggestion that it contains insights into the memory of Gustave Flaubert. This is compensated, however, by the freedom it displays in assimilating previous readers of Flaubert in an organic reading of the juvenile works, *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education Sentimentale*. Critical theorists are invoked in reference to key themes in the text, rather than in speculative theoretical relation to each other, and as such, *Flaubert Remembers* is an extremely useful work for the critical debutant faced with an edifice of Flaubertian theoretical criticism tangentially related to its ostensible subject.

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UCLA FRENCH DEPARTMENT 1991 DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Evelyne Charvier-Berman. *Les Personnages féminins et l'amour dans les contes et les nouvelles de Guy de Maupassant*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Hassan el Nouty, Chair, UCLA 1990).

This dissertation studies female characters in Guy de Maupassant's short stories. The impressive number of stories and female characters created by the writer imposed a brief statistical analysis of Maupassant's narratives and the selection of a representative sample of short stories bound both by thematic and structural criteria. All stories present one female character who springs from numerous semantic traits and is involved in an amorous relationship.

Part I of the study focuses on the female character as a creation of the literary text and centers upon its make-up and actions within the narrative. Chapter one deals with a close textual analysis of the being of the female character. It argues that the first name, last name and description of the character carry its constitutive semes which often encapsulate its narrative program. Chapter two centers on the actions the female character performs. Marriage, maternity, adultery, work, suicide or death are the often intertwined roads she travels but none of them leads her to happiness.

The malaise of Maupassant's female characters furnished the material for Part II of this study which focuses on the relationships between the literary text and the historical realities of the 1880's. Chapter one examines them and presents the feminist movements of the 1880-1890's as an element of response to the social uneasiness

French women were experiencing. Chapter two first draws close parallels between fictional characters and realities and proceeds to argue that Maupassant's protagonists sketch a complex analysis of female oppression and develop the tools to fight it.

Quietly, Maupassant's heroines corrode the patriarchal order they seem to bow to and, in so doing, become the subversive agents leading it to its destruction.

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